GEORGE KENNAN AND THE AGE OF TERRORISM
JOHN LEWIS GADDIS

REMEMBERING BELLOW
LEON WIESELTIER, JAMES WOOD

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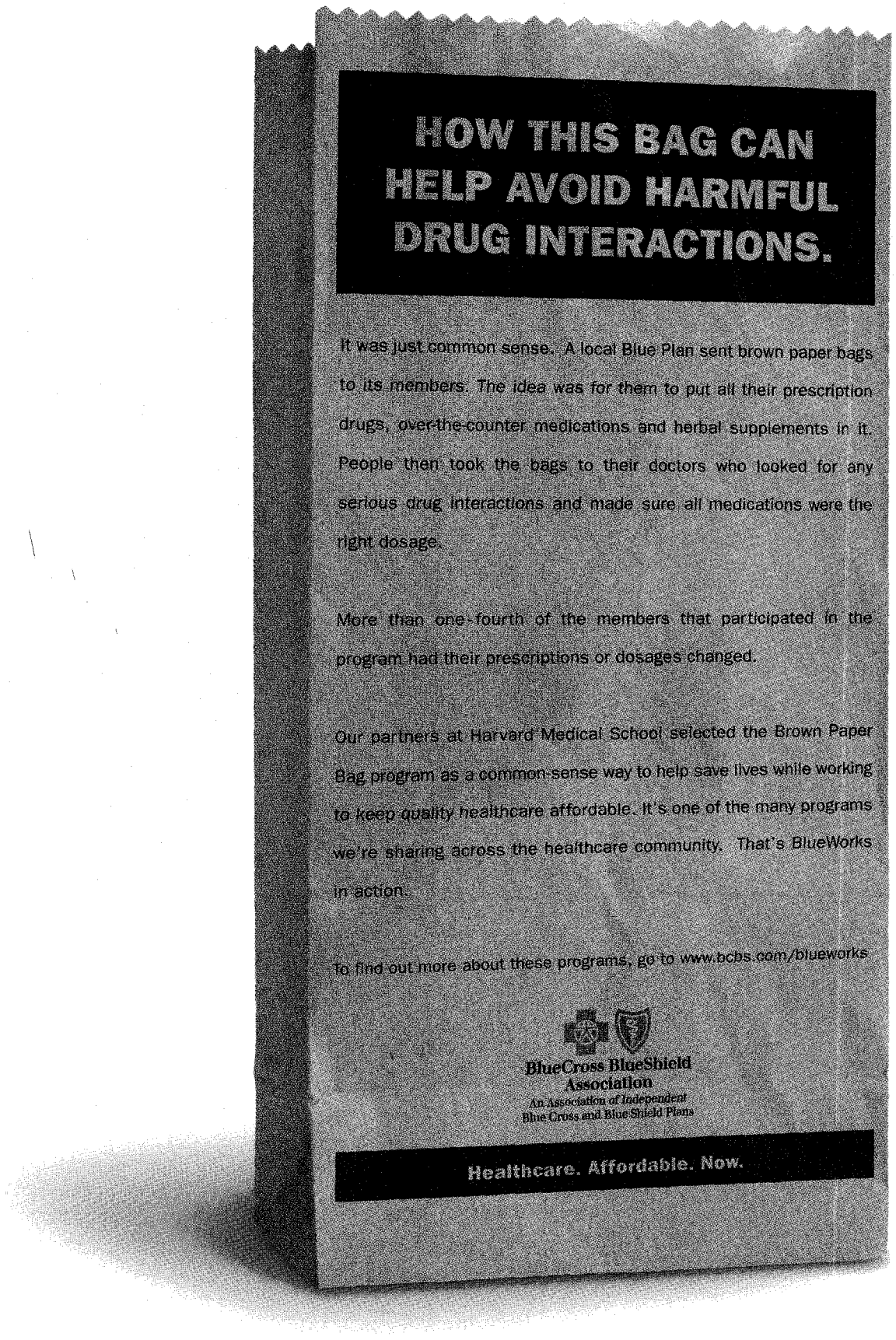
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CORRESPONDENCE

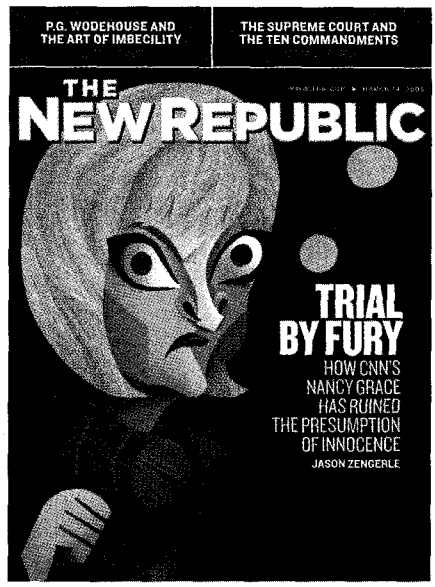
TRIED AND TRUE

I VERY MUCH ENJOYED THE RECENT article about Nancy Grace and completely share Jason Zengerle's sentiment ("Trial by Fury," March 14). At least from what I have seen, Grace seems hell-bent on destroying the presumption of innocence in the broader culture, if not the courts. I do, however, have one minor quibble. Near the end of the article, Zengerle claims that "Law & Order's Jack McCoy ... goes after the always-guilty bad guys." This is in fact not the case. A bare majority of "Law & Order" accused seem guilty, but the show also presents a large number of cases in which the accused turn out not to be guilty at all. Rather, it often becomes evident at trial that someone else is guilty. The show also has many episodes in which the hero wins a conviction but suggests to us in the closing sequence that he really isn't sure of the guilt of the accused. Say what you will about Nancy Grace, but don't malign Jack McCoy. It's sad that this is the only thing Zengerle gets wrong. I would prefer a world in which fictional TV drama is less, not more, nuanced than real-life legal "commentators."

RICHARD THOMPSON
Chicago, Illinois

PRIVATE INTEREST

LET'S HOPE THAT ADVOCATES OF international poverty reduction find C.K. Prahalad's insistence on the key role of the private sector more convincing than G. Pascal Zachary does ("Poor Idea," March 7). The author dismisses Prahalad's followers as businessmen with "guilty consciences," ignoring the possibility that, after decades of disappointing international development outcomes, embracing market mechanisms and including rather than excluding individuals from the mainstream economy may prove productive. Like any other, Prahalad's argument has shortcomings, notably his neglect of Africa and his reliance on a small sample of cases. But, as the intellectual leader of a new paradigm, his ideas must be given a fairer shake than what is provided here. In one of several irrelevant anecdotes, Zachary laments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THE SUPREME COURT AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS
THE NEW REPUBLIC
TRIAL BY FURY
HOW CNN'S NANCY GRACE HAS RUINED THE PRESUMPTION OF INNOCENCE
JASON ZENGERLE

Ghana's failure to attract foreign investment for its water system. But a "bottom of the pyramid" approach would more likely favor a company like Gillette providing micro-doses of water treatment tablets directly to consumers themselves, empowering them to solve a problem through the market without reliance on government. If we are to have any hope of meaningful, sustained poverty reduction, Zachary and the rest of us need to give approaches like this a chance to succeed before judging them.

ERIC CANTOR
New York, New York

G. PASCAL ZACHARY RESPONDS:
I'm all for "embracing market mechanisms" that enrich the poor people of the world. But let's choose mechanisms that work. If we don't get the means right, then, no matter how much we agree on ends, we'll achieve no more than the disappointing development initiatives of the past.

UNREMARKABLE

JASON ZENGERLE CLAIMS THAT MY Februrary 15 remarks at a meeting of the Harvard Faculty of Arts and Sciences included "a not-too-subtle rebuke of Summers's pro-Israel comments" ("Harvard Coup," March 7). This is entirely untrue. Available at the *Harvard Magazine* website, my remarks focused solely on internal matters of Harvard governance and called for free and open discussion of President Summers's January speech about women and science. I said nothing about Israel—and (contrary to what Zengerle implies) I have never participated in any petition or campaign aimed at criticizing Israel.

THEDA SKOCPOL
Professor
Department of Government
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

JASON ZENGERLE RESPONDS:
In her speech at the February 15 faculty meeting, Professor Skocpol said that President Summers's remarks about women and science—and, in her mind, his refusal to allow free and open discussion about those remarks—was harming Harvard "in effect, if not in intent." Considering that Summers had once famously accused some critics of Israel of "advocating and taking actions that are anti-Semitic in their effect, if not their intent," it is hard to believe that Skocpol's choice of such similar wording was merely a coincidence and not an attempt to link the women and science controversy to another grievance against Summers. Of course, Skocpol could have disabused me of such a notion if she had responded to either of the two phone messages I left for her before my story ran. ■

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Kill Phil

TRB

FROM ANN ARBOR

THINGS LOOK RELATIVELY GOOD for the Democrats right now. Social Security privatization is practically dead, Tom DeLay is actually on the defensive, and President Bush's approval rating is below 50 percent in many polls. But then there is Phil. Phil is the cartoon star of a new political advertising campaign to preserve the filibuster—the parliamentary maneuver that allows members of the U.S. Senate to delay votes indefinitely and that has, for the last few months, enabled Democrats to prevent the full Senate from voting on a handful of conservative Bush judicial nominees. Since Republicans can't muster the 60 votes necessary to overcome this particular filibuster, they now want to use their authority over Senate procedures to abolish the maneuver itself, at least for judicial nominees. Exercising this "nuclear option," as it is known, would theoretically require the support of just a simple majority of senators, which Republican leaders say they are on the verge of solidifying.

Phil (as in "Phil A. Buster") is out to stop them. In the video, Phil explains that he's part of the delicate system of checks and balances that the Founding Fathers built into American democracy. "It's the jobs of checks and balances to make sure that no one gets too much influence and everyone's voice is heard," Phil says. "But there are a few politicians that want to get rid of checks and balances by squashing little old me." With that, a giant animated robot bursts out of the Capitol rotunda and chases Phil down the street, shouting, "No checks ... no balances ... one-party rule!" As the video ends, Phil urges viewers to "contact your senator" so that "everyone's voice is heard."

With its upbeat jingle and affable main character, the Phil commercial appears to be modeled on the old "Schoolhouse Rock" videos from which generations of children learned basic civics lessons. But "Schoolhouse Rock" usually got its history right. Phil, whose arguments come straight from Democratic Party talking points, doesn't. While the Founding Fathers indeed built checks and balances into the Constitution, the filibuster wasn't among them. It's simply a rule that the U.S. Senate set for itself in the early 1800s.

And, while the filibuster has been around for nearly as long as the Constitution itself, for most of its history the parliamentary tactic was reserved for the most controversial measures, in part because it required senators to actually stand and speak—often straight through the night and into the next day—a spectacle memorialized by Jimmy Stewart in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington.* Filibusters no longer require such efforts, thanks to Senate custom, which is a big reason why they have become a matter of routine congressional business. There were fewer than 20 filibusters in the entire nineteenth century. But, since the 1970s, there have been hundreds, plus many more "silent" filibusters in the form of threats that simply prevented legislation from coming to the floor. As a practical matter, the Senate now passes most major laws only when 60 of its members agree.

Although, in recent years, Democrats have deployed the filibuster to block the Republican agenda, historically conservatives (like Strom Thurmond) were the ones most likely to use the filibuster over issues like civil rights legislation, while liberals (like Harry Truman) were the ones most likely to protest the obstruction to majority rule. Of course, the filibuster isn't so much hostile to any one ideology as it is to whichever party happens to propose the most radical changes in public policy, which is why it worked against Democrats before the Bush era and has worked against Republicans in the years since. But, while the whole point of the U.S. government is to thwart "tyranny of the majority," the filibuster has arguably gummed up the works too much, making shifts in public policy so rare that voters have grown increasingly angry at the apparent unresponsiveness of government—an emotion Republicans have proved particularly adept at exploiting lately. The majority party shouldn't get to be tyrants, but they should get to be legislators. That is why the filibuster needs to be severely curbed or even junked altogether, and not just for judicial nominations.

This isn't to say Democrats should simply forfeit the fight over conservative judges or any other matter. But, in the long run, it is a mistake to make such battles about legislative process rather than public values. Excessive appeals to parliamentary fairness merely reinforce the public's sense that Democrats care more about legalisms than the difference between right and wrong. This perception is particularly important given the Democrats' image of weakness on national security. Americans care about fair play and they don't want one-party rule. But they also seem to crave strength and moral clarity in the battle against terrorism.

Fighting Bush's judicial nominees on the merits of their views will inevitably draw Democrats into at least a few cultural debates they probably don't want to have right now. But, in a sense, that's precisely the point. The filibuster has become a crutch for Democrats, a way to defend their programs and values without having to actually win over voters. This is the same essential mistake Democrats have made over and over again since the early '70s in relying upon courts to secure rights (like unfettered access to abortion) and promote reforms (like affirmative action) for which they hadn't yet built solid popular support. These court decisions eventually provoked political backlashes that have hobbled Democrats since and, in cases like gay marriage, probably set back the liberal cause by many years. If Democrats hadn't been so successful in pushing the courts so far ahead of public opinion, it's possible they might have worked harder at actually convincing voters that they were right on these issues, bringing the political consensus closer to them rather than pushing it away.

Democrats are hardly the first American politicians to seek protection in political instruments designed to thwart the will of the majority. Indeed, it was a famous nineteenth-century senator from South Carolina, John C. Calhoun, who elevated the practice to a form of political philosophy. Calhoun argued that democracy would work best if the minority interests had a permanent veto over policy, a prerogative not unlike what the filibuster has become. But Calhoun championed such a system because, in the United States he knew, the South would never have as many congressional seats as the North. In other words, his side had become a perma nent minority, a fate the Democrats risk if they keep yoking their political hopes to the filibuster. **JONATHAN COHN**

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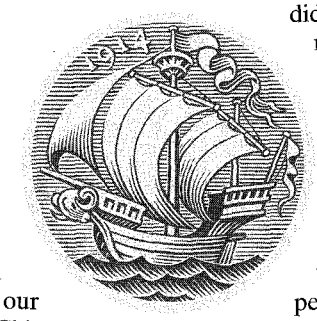
Protection Racket

THE BUSH WHITE HOUSE has always been of two minds on free trade. On the one hand, former U.S. Trade Representative Robert B. Zoellick did an admirable job of attacking global trade barriers, despite the short-term risk to U.S. industries and the anger of the sugar and cotton lobbies. On the other hand, the president has been willing to reverse course for short-term political gain, most notably with his infamous 2002 steel tariffs and his signing of the American Jobs Creation Act of 2004, which tossed millions of dollars in tax breaks to U.S. exporters.

Unfortunately, if recent actions are any indicator, this latter approach will dominate Bush's second term. The White House and the Republican-led Congress, perhaps with the 2006 midterms already in mind, are apoplectic over trade—and not without reason. Numbers released this week by the Commerce Department show a record February trade deficit of $61 billion; annualized, this puts the predicted 2005 deficit at $717.2 billion, $100 billion higher than 2004's record-setting total. And, while there are many reasons for the numbers—a growing economy, high gas prices—politicians have eagerly pointed to the powerful surge of Chinese textile and clothing imports, which grew by 9.8 percent in February alone and are up a whopping 62.5 percent over the first three months of 2004 (in some categories, import growth tops 1,000 percent).

The surge in Chinese imports has a simple explanation. On January 1, the Multi-Fiber Agreement (MFA), a global quota regime on a broad range of textiles and clothing, expired, unleashing a flood of Chinese exports onto the world market. According to the World Trade Organization, China may provide half the world's supply of clothing by 2007. Bush's response has been swift: In early April, under heavy pressure from the U.S. textile industry, the Commerce Department initiated a study of several categories of textile imports; if the study finds that these imports disrupt U.S. markets, then the Department will recommend reimposing quotas. Meanwhile, the Senate has taken up a plan to slap a 27.5 percent tariff on all Chinese exports unless Beijing revalues its currency within six months (the renminbi is currently pegged at a low rate to the dollar, making Chinese exports cheaper).

This response is ridiculous. For one thing, we have known that the textile surge was coming for a long time. In fact, the decade-long MFA phaseout was specifically designed by developed nations to give them maximum time to prepare for an onslaught of Third World imports. For another, the stark rise in textile imports belies an overall improvement in our trade position vis-à-vis China. While textile imports boomed, our trade deficit with China actually shrank by 9.2 percent from January, dropping from $15.3 billion to $13.9 billion. According to the Commerce Department, this was due largely to increased exports to China and a reduction in non-textile imports. That means that other, stickier issues, such as rising fuel prices, play a bigger part in our weak trade position than politicians recognize.



Enacting protectionist measures—though it would undoubtedly curry favor with the textile industry and its nearly 700,000 workers—would send exactly the wrong message to the rest of the world. The United States is not the only country reeling from Chinese imports; according to *The New York Times*, China, which once had a trade surplus with the United States but a deficit with the rest of the world, will soon be in the black globally—which means that the rest of the world will be in a spot similar to the United States. And there's a good chance that the way the world's largest economy responds to this challenge will quickly become a model for how the rest of the world behaves.

It would be one thing if Bush were acting to protect a growth industry. But domestic textile manufacturing has been on the wane for decades—not only because of competition from abroad, but because, as textile industry CEO Gary Heiman wrote in *The Washington Post* earlier this month, "American textile companies didn't discard failed business models and evolve when they had a chance." Unlike other sectors, the textile industry has been slow to invest in research and development and switch to higher-end products, in which it might hold a competitive advantage. Thus a supposedly principled conservative administration is willing to go to the mat for an industry that has proved unwilling to keep up with the rest of the economy. Bush has often espoused a God-helps-those-who-help-themselves economic philosophy. But, apparently, he's not above giving an undeserved handout to those who can help him politically. ■

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NOTEBOOK

THE PASSION OF PAUL . . . JOHN KERRY'S GALL

A GOOD CATHOLIC AND A BAD ANCHOR

NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES THE talking heads described Pope John Paul II's funeral last week as "moving," they mostly treated it like any other media spectacle: an opportunity to produce pabulum. But there was at least one genuine moment of on-air passion. It came on CNN's "Inside Politics," which invited two of the network's political—and Catholic—commentators, the conservative Robert Novak and the liberal Paul Begala, to engage in a little left-right debate about the Pope. If this sounds like a typically uninspired idea, it was—or it was until the show's co-host, Wolf Blitzer, introduced the two men as "both good Catholics," before adding, "I'm sure Bob is a good Catholic, I'm not sure about Paul Begala." That didn't sit well with Begala, who interjected, "[W]ho are you to pass moral judgment on my religion, Mr. Blitzer . . . on the day of my Holy Father's funeral? My eldest son is named John Paul, after the Pope." Blitzer, apparently thinking the banter was all in good fun, asked, "So are you a good Catholic?" That only inflamed things. "I'm serious, that annoys me. I don't think anybody should presume that a liberal is not a good Catholic," Begala replied, going on to explain that a number of the Pope's views—such as his opposition to the death penalty and the war in Iraq—were "extraordinarily liberal." "I was only teasing," Blitzer apologized. "Don't be so sensitive." Which prompted Begala to explain: "Well, it's an important day for my faith. . . . It's the only Pope of my adult lifetime, so I'm a little emotional." We're glad that someone genuinely was.

KERRY SOUR-GRAPES WATCH

JOHN KERRY SEEMS TO THINK THAT, despite what the electorate decided, it had been somehow, somewhere ordained that he be president. So he has

Wolf Blitzer

spent the last five months looking desperately for one explanation after another for why he, in fact, is not. It has been a piteous display. Contrast this with the consummate dignity Al Gore demonstrated after his real victory was turned to defeat by a predictable five-to-four majority of the U.S. Supreme Court. Previously, when going around the country to rouse the Democratic diehards (there weren't really many true Kerry faithful), the Massachusetts senator would evoke a phantom change of heart of some 60,000 people in a stadium in Ohio that might have made him president. As if a change of heart would have all gone his way. But, had it, George W. Bush would then have lost with what would still have been a two-and-a-half-million-vote popular majority to his name. Those who disdain the present Bush mandate might wonder what kind of mandate a minority president would possess. This apparently does not trouble Kerry, who is off on a new, and even tackier, gambit questioning the legitimacy of the 2004 election. According to the Associated Press, Kerry told the League of Women Voters in Boston how trickery foiled many voters: "Leaflets [were] handed out, saying Democrats vote on Wednesday, Republicans vote on Tuesday. . . . People are told in telephone calls that, if you've ever had a parking ticket, you're not allowed to vote." And we actually thought the Democratic base was made up of the smart elites, not fools who would fall for such moronic tricks. But it tells you something about Kerry that he thinks his supporters are also stupid.

REDUCTIO AD HITLERUM

THERE IS NO RHETORICAL TACTIC more overwrought than comparing one's ideological opponents to Nazis. So it comes as no surprise that a politically conservative clergyman has insensitively compared an international gay pride festival and march planned for Jerusalem this summer to "the Nazis marching in Skokie."

What is a surprise is that this disrespectful and inapt comparison comes from a Jewish clergyman, Rabbi Daniel Lapin, president of the conservative political group Toward Tradition. Lapin is not the only religious leader to voice objections to the World Pride Festival. On March 30, a coalition of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim clerics came together to announce their united opposition to its presence in Jerusalem. It would have been heartening to see these disparate groups united in something. Too bad it was only in their common bigotry.

That bigotry may be genuinely theological in origin, but Lapin's dishonesty is not. Religious leaders may object to homosexuality, but they cannot plausibly claim that the gay pride parade advocates intolerance—much less harm—against people of faith, as the neo-Nazis marching in Skokie clearly wished on

DAVID COWLES

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the city's largely Jewish population. In using such outlandish rhetoric, Lapin is a bit like Goebbels—oops, did we say that?

WHY BLAIR WILL WIN

With British elections coming up in early May, the Conservative Party is taking a hard line on immigration. But, last month, Tory parliamentary candidate Ed Matts appeared at a rally for a family from Malawi threatened with deportation after their asylum request was denied. He was photographed holding a picture of the family; next to him was Ann Widdecombe, a prominent Tory minister of Parliament, holding a placard that read LET THEM STAY.

It was a nice photo. Nice enough that Matts decided to republish it in his campaign literature. Only, the photo that wound up gracing a Matts leaflet had been doctored. Now, instead of a picture of the family, Matts appears to be holding a sign that reads CONTROLLED IMMIGRATION..., while the one held by Widdecombe reads ... NOT CHAOS AND INHUMANITY. The ham-handed doctoring was quickly discovered, causing much embarrassment for the already demoralized Conservatives. Their leader, Michael Howard, was forced to make a statement that his party's position on immigration "could not be clearer." At least after the retouching, that is.

FROM THE ATTIC

The New Republic is pleased to announce the launch of the TNR Archive, a complete library of the first-rate reportage, editorials, and criticism that has graced our pages from our founding in 1914 through 2000 (articles from the most recent of our 90 years are available on our website). The Archive can be found at www.tnr.com/arch and is searchable by author, subject, and date. And since, with 90 years of history, there's a lot to choose from, sign up for the TNR Historical Society and we'll send you some of the best selections every week. ■

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&c.

NOAM SCHEIBER

DOES THE GOP REALLY WANT TO GO NUCLEAR?: I tried and failed to write a column this week about why Democrats should call the GOP's bluff on the nuclear option. Turns out community rights activists Douglas Kendall and Jennifer Bradley were thinking the same thing, only they had a fleshed-out argument. Their op-ed in the April 5 edition of *Roll Call* contends that preventing Democrats from filibustering judicial nominees would put serious pressure on Republican moderates, who currently enjoy the best of both worlds: They can please their party leadership by voting for cloture, but then turn around and vote against a specific nominee to appease their constituents. That's a luxury they wouldn't have if judicial filibusters went by the wayside. The result is that they'd probably be much more isolated from their GOP colleagues. Of course, the nuclear option would still increase the number of actual judges confirmed, since anyone approved in the current Senate could get approved in the post-apocalyptic Senate, but not vice versa. Still, the additional pressure on Republican moderates is not nothing.

For the record, my thought on this is that eliminating judicial filibusters actually puts additional pressure on the White House. I agree with Will Saletan of *Slate*, who argues that the White House has bought into the current "conservative pro-choice" consensus on abortion—i.e., it favors restrictions on abortion and abortion funding, but doesn't favor overturning the basic right to an abortion. Today, the White House can credibly argue that any conservative activist bent on overturning *Roe* v. *Wade* would be filibustered, so there's no point in nominating one. (Just as President Bush recently pleaded to conservative evangelical leaders that there's no point in pushing an anti-gay-marriage amendment since the votes in the Senate aren't there.) Absent the filibuster excuse, Bush would have a much harder time resisting demands from his base that he nominate that kind of candidate. The flaw in this logic is that there are plenty of what my colleague Jeff Rosen calls "principled conservative judges" from which the White House could choose. These are people who personally oppose abortion but have sufficient respect for precedent that they're unlikely to support overturning *Roe*. I suspect people like this—a Michael McConnell or a J. Michael Luttig—would be agreeable to social conservatives, which would allow Bush to thread the needle on abortion.

IRAQ'D

SPENCER ACKERMAN

SADR'S REAL STRENGTHS: Tens of thousands of Sadrist demonstrators in Baghdad may have shouted demands for U.S. withdrawal and pulled down an effigy of President Bush in Firdos Square, but their real target wasn't the United States. It was the Shia political establishment. As Sheik Fatih Kashif Al Ghitaa, a cleric close to Moqtada Al Sadr, told *The Wall Street Journal*, the protest was "a form of putting pressure on [Prime Minister Ibrahim] Jaafari." That is, as promised, Sadr is using a prolonged occupation tacitly blessed by his Shia rivals to revive himself as a political force threatening Jaafari and his backers in the very anti-Sadr Najaf clerisy.

It's often objected that Sadr's position as a clerical lightweight, compared with his Najafi enemies, means his appeal will ultimately falter if the Shia view him alongside their "object of emulation," Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani. There's surely something to this, as evidenced by the fact that Sadr typically references "our great religious authorities" before not-too-subtly attacking what they advocate. And I wonder if I haven't given the potency of Sadr's demagoguery too much credit in the past. The political forces he seeks to topple—the big Shia parties SCIRI and Dawa—seem to have come up with a potentially powerful response: co-option. "We agree that we need a pullout soon," SCIRI's Saad Jawad Kindil told the *Journal*, "and we will negotiate with the multinational forces the right circumstances for this speedy withdrawal." Sadr's people are basically arguing that the "right circumstances" are already in place: "Today's protest proves that Iraqis are able to maintain security by themselves, without an American presence," the Sadrist parliamentarian Fatah Sheikh told the *Los Angeles Times*. With insurgents continuing to attack the Shia, it's questionable whether very many people would agree.

That said, Sadr may have more success using the occupation issue to raise broader questions about SCIRI and Dawa. As *The Washington Post* reported on Friday, in the Shia south, discontentment about the parties' thuggery is real enough to make some officials consider Sadrist thuggery an acceptable alternative. How SCIRI and Dawa respond to this challenge will say as much about their competence as politicians as it does about the true depth of Sadr's support.

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White House Watch

Charles at Large

BY RYAN LIZZA

IMAGINE FOR A moment that, in 2003, Saddam Hussein had accepted one of those offers of exile floated by Middle Eastern leaders to avert war. Imagine further that, rather than retiring in anonymous luxury to some oil emirate, Saddam immediately began to violate the terms of his expulsion by meddling in Iraqi politics, setting the stage for his eventual return. Then imagine that he was found to have orchestrated an assassination attempt on, say, the leader of Qatar. Imagine that all of this was happening while a U.N. court backed and funded by the United States indicted Saddam on 17 counts of crimes against humanity. Imagine that the court investigators had credibly established Saddam's links to Al Qaeda. Finally, imagine that, when a bipartisan coalition in Congress demanded Saddam be turned over to that war crimes court, the Bush administration simply ignored them, choosing instead to protect Saddam.

Yes, this all sounds insane. The Bush administration doesn't let Al Qaeda–linked dictators slink off into cushy exile where they can set up shop and destabilize whole regions of the world. But this is exactly what is happening in West Africa. Substitute Liberia for Iraq and Charles Taylor for Saddam Hussein, and this nightmare is reality.

IT'S HARD TO remember now, but the conflict in Liberia seized the Bush White House for several weeks in the summer of 2003. A civil war threatened to destroy the country's capital and kill many civilians, and President Bush was under intense international pressure to do something about it. In the end, the administration helped broker a deal whereby Liberian president Charles Taylor, a war criminal indicted by a U.S.-funded international tribunal known as the Special Court for Sierra Leone, was allowed to flee to Nigeria, provided he promise to stay out of Liberian politics. (At the time, the Bush administration was cagey about its role in the asylum deal, but, last year, Howard Jeter, the American ambassador to Nigeria during the crisis, told Congress that Nigeria "acted with our full knowledge and concurrence.") In Liberia, American soldiers and eventually a U.N. peacekeeping mission stabilized the country and set it on a fragile path to peace and democracy. Taylor settled into a seaside villa in Calabar, Nigeria.

During some 14 years in Liberia, as warlord and then as president, Taylor fueled wars across four countries, which cost hundreds of thousands of lives and introduced the world to horrors like "the small boys unit" and the widespread dismemberment of innocents. His rebels pillaged Sierra Leone and raided its diamond fields. He turned Liberia into a vast criminal enterprise and helped Al Qaeda convert its cash into diamonds in the months before September 11. Today, he is the only indicted mass murderer in the world who lives freely and openly. The *genocidaires* of Rwanda are, in fits and starts, being brought to justice. Slobodan Milosevic sits in a cell at The Hague. Saddam Hussein is jailed in Iraq. It is only in West Africa that the international community, with the approval of the Bush administration, has allowed a war criminal of such scale to live untouched by the law.

When Bush acquiesced to Taylor's asylum deal in 2003, State Department officials promised critics of the agreement that Taylor's exile was simply a temporary step in bringing him to justice, insisting that the soft landing for Taylor was the only way to avert catastrophe in Liberia. "First we'll get him out of Liberia, then we'll get him to the Court," an official in the Department's African Affairs Bureau told me at the time. But it has been almost two years, and—according to sources at the war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone, human rights groups, and Republicans and Democrats in Congress who monitor the issue—the Bush administration has made no effort whatsoever to get Taylor out of Nigeria.

Meanwhile, Taylor has brazenly flouted the terms of his exile. Last April, he gave an hour-long TV interview in Nigeria in which he said he would like to return to Liberia. He has been in regular contact via e-mail and telephone with his former aides. He is helping several parties that will compete in the Liberian elections scheduled for October. Last August, the United Nations had to slap a travel ban on several Liberians because they were acting as couriers for Taylor. A March 17 U.N. report noted, "[F]ormer military commanders and business associates, as well as members of [Taylor's] political party, maintain regular contact with him and are planning to undermine the peace process." Last month, Jacques Klein, the U.N. special representative in Liberia, told NPR that Taylor's former allies are simply awaiting his return to the country. "Charles Taylor's a psychopath and a killer," Klein added. "He's still very much involved. He's intrusive in Liberian politics."

Now intelligence sources in West Africa report that Taylor's meddling has turned violent. On January 19, gunmen opened fire on the motorcade of President Lansana Conte of Guinea, a neighboring country that backed the rebel movement that forced Taylor from power. Conte is an ailing dictator with no obvious successor, and his death could plunge Guinea into the sort of chaos that has consumed the region. According to a detailed, 30-page intelligence report written by investigators at the Special Court and obtained by THE NEW REPUBLIC, Taylor was behind the failed assassination plot. The report concludes that "the credible information we have received clearly validates the allegations that Charles Taylor was directly involved in the assassination attempt of President Lansana Conte." According to the report, the Guinean intelligence service and the Gambian government have both confirmed Taylor's role.

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The report alleges that Taylor is trying to destabilize one or more countries in the region as a first step toward leaving Nigeria and once again taking up arms. In fact, it says that "[c]urrent credible information indicates Taylor is planning another assassination attempt against President Conte," an accusation worth taking seriously, considering that these same sources warned investigators about the first Taylor-backed assassination plot weeks before it happened. In an April 7 letter to Republican Representative Frank Wolf, a supporter of bringing Taylor to justice, Alan White, the Court's chief investigator, wrote, "The assassination attempt and coup plot occurred precisely as reported to us, including the date. ... Taylor has expanded his plan to destabilize the region by recruiting dissidents from The Gambia, Senegal, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Ivory Coast."

One of the report's most shocking allegations is that Taylor is not even confined to Nigeria. A senior Court official says he has confirmed that Taylor traveled to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in late February and stayed for two days at a home he keeps there in his wife's name. According to the official, Taylor used the trip to meet with associates about the upcoming Liberian elections and to pick up cash from an account at the Central Bank of West African States. According to the same Court official, the Nigerian security officer who is responsible for Taylor recently told the Court that Taylor's e-mail and phone calls are not monitored, that he receives visitors, and that, contrary to popular belief, he is not under house arrest.

WHY HAS THE Bush administration not acted to bring Taylor to the Court? In part because of familiar divisions within its foreign policy team. On the one hand are the career officers who dominate the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs and have a Nigeria-centric view of West Africa. Nigeria is an increasing source of oil for the United States, and Nigerian forces are needed throughout the continent for key peacekeeping missions, including the one in Darfur. This camp still argues—despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary—that Taylor's asylum is an effective method of containment and that the Bush administration has too many other regional priorities to waste its time pressuring Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, who takes a dim view of the Court and is loath to break his deal with Taylor. The Africa bureau and its allies at the CIA and FBI have routinely downplayed Taylor's regional ambitions and his links to Al Qaeda, which have been confirmed by the Court as well as by an investigative report that will soon air on NBC. The alleged Bush doctrine of eschewing stability for democratic change has not yet arrived in this corner of the State Department. "I think part of the problem is that the people in there are a jaded set of Africanists," says a Court official. "They are too cynical to believe the rule of law could apply in Africa, and [to them], anyone who believes the opposite is naïve."

To the extent that there is a countervailing force to the Africanists, it is represented by Pierre-Richard Prosper, the ambassador-at-large in the State Department's Office of War Crimes Issues. He told Congress last June that "it is U.S. policy that Taylor must be held accountable and must appear before the Court." But, since those words were uttered, there has been no action on the issue.

Beneath differing views on Africa policy within the bureaucracy may lie a more sinister reason for the administration's intransigence. One of the most persistent rumors in the circle of policy wonks, reporters, and government officials who follow the issue is that the Bushies are gun-shy about a trial, because Taylor would reveal some unsavory details about his relationship with the United States. It has been widely alleged but never confirmed that Taylor was a source of U.S. intelligence on Libya. Douglas Farah, the former West Africa correspondent for *The Washington Post* and the author of a recent book documenting Taylor's ties to Al Qaeda, says he has now unambiguously confirmed that Taylor was indeed on the U.S. payroll. Farah told me, "Taylor was a paid informant of the U.S. Defense Department intelligence service and reported regularly on his trips to Libya from at least 1992 to 1995. Debriefings took place in Ouagadougou. It was at a time when the United States had very little access to Muammar Qaddafi, and Taylor was traveling to Libya twice a month and meeting regularly with Qaddafi and Qaddafi's senior people ... I know this from folks on the U.S. side and people on the ground in Africa. They delivered attaché cases of cash [to Taylor] in return. It was clearly a paid relationship. This was the period when the worst abuses were being committed by Taylor's child soldiers in the war in Liberia."

If in fact fears about such revelations are preventing the Bush administration from forcing Taylor to the Court, perhaps it shouldn't worry. Subsidizing and encouraging Taylor's relationship with Qaddafi—who was in turn funding Taylor's guerrilla movement and is almost as responsible as Taylor for the past 15 years of West African violence—would undoubtedly rank as one of the more appalling U.S. foreign policy operations in recent years. But previous U.S. relationships with Manuel Noriega, Slobodan Milosevic, and Saddam Hussein did not stop us from confronting them when the time came. And, as some Bush supporters argued during the run-up to the war with Iraq, past complicity with a war criminal makes the United States *more* responsible to bring the outlaw to justice, not less.

This week, Ed Royce, a California representative and longtime leader of the anti-Taylor forces in Congress, introduced a resolution calling on Nigeria to send Taylor to the Court. Recently, the European Parliament passed a similar motion. Senate Democrats like Patrick Leahy, as well as officials at the Court in Sierra Leone, want Bush to take the issue to the Security Council and force Nigeria to hand over Taylor or face sanctions. Bush should be commended for getting Taylor out of Liberia. Now he should get Taylor to the Court. ■

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Juan Cole's bad blog.

Dear Diary

BY EFRAIM KARSH

Before September 11, 2001, Juan Cole, a history professor at the University of Michigan, enjoyed anonymity outside his professional circle. He was a leading figure in the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA), editing for five years its flagship publication, *The International Journal of Middle East Studies*. (In 2004, he was elected the Association's incoming president.) But his research on certain esoteric aspects of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Middle East (e.g., the genesis of the Baha'i faith) was unlikely to bring him attention in the field and offered little hope of public acclaim. Then came September 11. When MESA came under intense criticism after the terrorist attacks for having failed to educate generations of students in the realities of the Middle East, Cole was livid. Finding it difficult to place opinion pieces in the mainstream press that could present reality as he saw it, he had the prescience to realize the immense opportunities that an online diary offered.

Cole started his blog, which he called *Informed Comment* and subtitled *Thoughts on the Middle East, History, and Religion*, in April 2002. It quickly established itself as a popular source of information on the Middle East, attracting a reported 200,000 page-views per month. *Informed Comment* also caught the eye of journalists, earning Cole dozens of mentions in the country's top dailies and newsweeklies, an hour-long appearance on NPR's "Fresh Air," and 14 appearances on the "NewsHour" with Jim Lehrer. *The Village Voice* advised its readers, "If you're not already visiting Juan Cole's Informed Comment blog (juancole.com) on a daily basis, now's the time to get in the habit," while *L.A. Weekly* called Cole's blog "a must-read for anyone seriously interested in Iraq." In 2003, *Informed Comment* won the 2003 Koufax Award for best expert blog, and, last year, Cole was even asked to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the fissures within Iraqi society and his ideas for creating a stable Iraqi government.

The appeal of Cole's blog is easy to see. It is highly readable, stripped of the jargon common to other Middle East academic researchers. And Cole provides a wealth of information on the Sisyphean U.S. effort to reconstruct Iraq (a country that Cole himself has never visited) and the violent opposition to this endeavor, at times from Arabic newspapers not normally available to Western readers (Cole, unlike many journalists—and even some Middle East experts—reads Arabic). What's more, Cole has called himself "an outspoken hawk in the war on terror," and his views on the invasion of Afghanistan and the Iraq war, both of which he supported (while also voicing concerns about U.S. unilateralism), seem to bolster his credibility, reassuring readers that he doesn't suffer from the knee-jerk anti-Americanism found in many Middle East studies departments.

But, unfortunately, Cole suffers from many other common Arabist misconceptions that deeply prejudice and compromise his writing. Having done hardly any independent research on the twentieth-century Middle East, Cole's analysis of this era is essentially derivative, echoing the conventional wisdom among Arabists and Orientalists regarding Islamic and Arab history, the creation of the modern Middle East in the wake of World War I, and its relations with the outside world. Worse, Cole's discussion of U.S. foreign policy frequently veers toward conspiratorial anti-Semitism. This is hardly the "informed" commentary Cole claims it to be.

Among the Arabist orthodoxies to which Cole subscribes is the view that external powers are responsible for the Middle East's endemic malaise. The West is blamed for (allegedly) carving the defunct Ottoman Empire into artificial entities, in accordance with its imperial interests and with complete disregard for the yearning of the indigenous peoples for political unity. Many of the problems of contemporary Arab societies are also ascribed to the legacy of Western colonialism. For instance, in an article titled "WHY WE CAN BLAME 20TH CENTURY IMPERIALISM FOR MANY OF OUR 21ST CENTURY PROBLEMS," Cole identified "the dead hand of Western European colonialism" behind some of the Middle East's major conflicts. "Imperialism depended on dominating, humiliating and exploiting others, and on drawing artificial boundaries for European strategic purposes," he argues, adding elsewhere that "the Middle East suffers from having small countries imposed by Western colonialism." These standard assertions not only ignore the active role played by local leaders in the reshaping of their region after World War I, they also overlook the fact that many Middle Eastern countries (Iraq, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, to mention but a few) are substantially larger than the country that is often held culpable for their ills: Great Britain.

There has been no real discussion of the veracity of this blame-the-West hypothesis since it was spelled out in the mid-'30s, and the handful of scholars who dared to broach the subject were viciously attacked and marginalized. The eminent British historian Elie Kedourie was even denied a doctorate at Oxford University for having refused to revise his dissertation to conform with this dogma. When Kedourie later led the assault on the blame-the-West thesis, the denizens of Middle East studies shunned him.

Yet it is the inculcation of this misguided dogma in generations of students that prevented the anticipation of the

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September 11 attacks and has subsequently held back a correct prognosis of their root causes. Blaming the victim for its misfortune, most Arabists portray September 11 as a response to an arrogant and self-serving U.S. foreign policy by a fringe extremist group whose violent interpretation of Islam has little to do with the actual spirit and teachings of this religion. Ignoring centuries of Islamic jihads against those deemed infidels and the deeply illiberal elements of Islam, Cole claims, "Radical Islamism was first provoked to terrorism in Egypt precisely by the arrogance of British power there, beginning a genealogy of violence that leads through Ayman al-Zawahiri directly to September 11, 2001." Were U.S. policy to become more attuned to Muslim sensibilities, Cole and his fellow Arabists imply, Islamic militants would be discredited and the ticking bomb, so to speak, would be defused.

LIKE MANY OF those who inhabit Middle East studies departments, Cole believes that the U.S. policy that most inflames Muslims is support for Israel. He writes that "knee-jerk US support for Israeli expansionism is at the root of anti-Americanism in the Arab world." While Cole pays the customary lip service on his blog to Israel's right to exist within its pre-1967 borders (and says it would be worth American lives to defend Tel Aviv), he also makes clear that he thinks the Middle East would have been better off without the Jewish state. Discounting altogether the millenarian Jewish attachment to Palestine, so as to misrepresent Israel's creation as an ordinary colonialist project, he claims in one post that it would have been preferable for the British to have simply accepted Jewish refugees "rather than saddling a small, poor peasant country with 500,000 immigrants hungry to make the place their own." He goes on to perversely blame Israel for Arab militarism, contending that "the rise of Israel put pressure on Arab budgets, when a different sort of neighbour might have allowed them to invest the money in more fruitful areas than the military."

Cole glibly claims, "[T]o any extent that contemporary Muslims have a problem with Jews, it is largely driven by what they see as injustices done by Zionists to the Palestinians." Such ahistorical analysis ignores a deep anti-Jewish bigotry that dates to Islam's earliest days and reflects the prophet Muhammad's outrage over the rejection of his religious message by the contemporary Jewish community. To his credit, Cole criticized the Egyptian government's 2002 decision to air a TV serial based on *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a virulent anti-Semitic tract fabricated by the Russian secret police at the turn of the twentieth century that alleges an organized Jewish conspiracy to achieve world domination. But the line of argument he uses repeats the same ahistorical belief that the *Protocols* are a recent alien import to Arab societies that "had no particular resonances in the Muslim world (outside a few radical Muslim cliques) until the past couple of decades."

Cole should know better than that. The *Protocols* have been a staple of Arab-Muslim anti-Semitism since the early twentieth century, published in numerous editions and in several different translations, including one by the brother of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. (Nasser himself would recommend the pamphlet as a useful guide to the "Jewish mind," as would his successor, Anwar Sadat, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, Muammar Qaddafi of Libya, and Yasir Arafat, among many others.) Less than a year after their airing on Egyptian television, the *Protocols* were saliently displayed alongside a Torah scroll in an exhibition at the newly built Alexandria library.

Nor are the *Protocols* the only popular anti-Semitic import in the Muslim-Arab world. The "blood libel"—the medieval Christian fabrication that claimed Jews use gentile blood, and particularly the blood of children, for ritual purposes—was imported to the Ottoman Empire as early as the fifteenth century (and not hundreds of years later, as Cole asserts), and it was quickly internalized in the Muslim imagination, where it remains firmly implanted to this day. The libel surfaced numerous times during the pre-Zionist nineteenth century across the Muslim World, from Aleppo to Damascus to Antioch. As late as October 2000, the largest Egyptian government daily, *Al Ahram*, which is probably the world's foremost Arabic-language newspaper, published an almost full-page article titled "JEWISH MATZAH IS MADE OF ARAB BLOOD."

COLE MAY EXPRESS offense at the *Protocols*, but their obsession with the supposed international influence of "world Zionism" resonates powerfully in his own writings. How else can one describe his depiction of U.S. foreign policy as controlled by a ruthless Zionist cabal implanted at the highest echelons of the Bush administration and employing "sneaky methods of propaganda, disinformation and manipulation of intelligence" to promote its goals? And what of Cole's claim that the pro-Israel lobby AIPAC, in alliance with the Christian Right, represents a sinister force controlling congressional decisions on policy toward Israel? "The Founding Fathers of the United States deeply feared that a foreign government might gain this level of control over a branch of the United States government, and their fears have been vindicated," Cole laments.

The chairman and CEO of this imaginary Zionist cabal is Israeli premier and Likud leader Ariel Sharon, whom Cole despises—so much so that he cannot bring himself to refer to Sharon without resorting to the vilest invectives. He is the butcher of Beirut, a mafia don, war criminal, land grabber, starver of children, and so on. "Couldn't he shut his enormous pie hole[?]" Cole wonders of Sharon. "Apparently [Bush] has fallen for a line from the neo-cons in his administration that they can deliver the Jewish vote to him in 2004 if only he kisses Sharon's ass," he writes in another post. And all this comes from a historian priding himself on his dispassionate and evenhanded approach.

Cole is of course not the first nor the last to argue that

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U.S. foreign policy has been hijacked by the Jewish state (one recalls Pat Buchanan's description of Congress as Israel's "amen corner"). But, while most anti-Israel (indeed, anti-Jewish) critics tend to hide behind the more neutral term "neocons," Cole does not shy from labeling prominent Jewish members of the Bush administration (or, for that matter, anyone not overtly hateful of Sharon) as "Likudniks."

Conscious of the racist overtones of his criticism, Cole attempts to present it as purely businesslike. "Some have attempted to argue that the very term 'Neoconservative' is a code word for derogatory attitudes toward Jews," he writes. "This argument is mere special pleading and a playing of the race card, however, insofar as only a tiny percentage of American Jews are Neoconservatives, and only a tiny percentage of Neoconservatives are Jews." True enough. But then why the substitution of the term Likudniks for neocons? And why is it that the Likudniks who most obsess Cole all have names like Wolfowitz, Feith, Perle, Adelman, Ledeen, Gaffney, Wurmser, Pipes, Rubin, or Kristol?

How are the American Likudniks going to use their overwhelming prowess? To embroil the United States in "serial wars with Iraq, Iran, Syria, N. Korea, and apparently ultimately China." "The war in Iraq is scary for many reasons," Cole wrote on March 6, 2003. "But what is really scary is that many of the hawks in the Bush administration say, 'after Baghdad, Beijing.'"

In pursuing these outlandish ideas, the Washington Likudniks are following in the footsteps of their warlike spiritual mentor and political ally, Sharon, whose 1982 invasion of Lebanon Cole sees echoed in the Iraq war. "Sharon just wanted to reshape Lebanese politics, the way his disciples in the Bush administration now want to reshape Iraqi politics," he wrote shortly before the outbreak of hostilities. "We'll see if the American Likudniks have more luck than Sharon himself did." But, whether or not Iraq's politics will be successfully reshaped, the real goal of "Wolfowitz's adventure in Iraq" is "to defang Iraq as a favor to Ariel Sharon."

Cole provides no proof whatsoever for this conspiratorial thinking—there is none. During Saddam's 25 years in power, Iraq killed not a single Israeli. Nor has a single American soldier ever been sent to fight on Israel's behalf. It is therefore complete nonsense to suggest that the United States would go to war to defend Israel, rather than its own national security.

But, in Cole's fertile imagination, there are no limits to Sharon's domination of the White House. "[I]f Sharon and AIPAC decide that they need the US government to take military action against Iran," he ominously prophesied, "it is likely that the US government will do so." On another occasion, he speculated that the neocons had manipulated American forces in Iraq to try to capture the militant Shia cleric Moqtada Al Sadr "because he had objected so loudly to Sharon's murder of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the clerical leader of the Hamas Party." If you believe this, you'll believe anything. But perhaps that's what Cole has been banking on all along. ■

Saying goodbye to Bellow.

Gratitude

BY JAMES WOOD

I JUDGED ALL modern prose by his. Unfair, certainly, because he made even the fleet-footed—the Updikes, the DeLillos, the Roths—seem like monopodes. Yet what else could I do? I discovered Saul Bellow's prose in my late teens, and henceforth, the relationship had the quality of a love affair about which one could not keep silent. Over the last week, much has been said about Bellow's prose, and most of the praise—perhaps because it has been overwhelmingly by men—has tended toward the robust: We hear about Bellow's mixing of high and low registers, his Melvillean cadences jostling the jivey Yiddish rhythms, the great teeming democracy of the big novels, the crooks and frauds and intellectuals who loudly people the brilliant sensorium of the fiction. All of this is true enough; John Cheever, in his journals, lamented that, alongside Bellow's fiction, his stories seemed like mere suburban splinters. Ian McEwan wisely suggested last week that British writers and critics may have been attracted to Bellow precisely because he kept alive a Dickensian amplitude now lacking in the English novel.

But nobody mentioned the beauty of this writing, its music, its high lyricism, its firm but luxurious pleasure in language itself. Like all serious novelists, Bellow read poetry: Shakespeare first (he could recite lines and lines from the plays, remembered from his school days in Chicago), then Milton, Keats, Wordsworth, Hardy, Larkin, and his old friend John Berryman. And, behind all this, with its English stretching all the way back into deeper antiquity, the King James Bible. Nobody mentioned the way Bellow could describe a river as "crimped, green, blackish, glassy," or Chicago as "blue with winter, brown with evening, crystal with frost," or New York as "sheer walls, gray spaces, dry lagoons of tar and pebbles." Here is a paragraph, one of my favorite in all Bellow, from the story "The Old System":

> On the airport bus, he opened his father's copy of the Psalms. The black Hebrew letters only gaped at him like open mouths with tongues hanging down, pointing upward, flaming but dumb. He tried—forcing. It did no good. The tunnel, the swamps, the auto skeletons, machine entrails, dumps, gulls, sketchy Newark trembling in fiery summer, held his attention minutely. ... Then in the plane running with concentrated fury to take off—the power to pull away from the magnetic earth, and more: When he saw the ground tilt backward, the machine rising from the runway, he said to himself in clear internal words, "*Shema Yisroel*," Hear, O Israel, God alone is God! On the right, New York leaned gigantically seaward,

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and the plane with a jolt of retracted wheels turned toward the river. The Hudson green within green, and rough with tide and wind. Isaac released the breath he had been holding, but sat belted tight. Above the marvelous bridges, over clouds, sailing in atmosphere, you know better than ever that you are no angel.

I suppose there must be people—as there are people left cold by Mozart or Brahms—who are untouched by such a passage, though I pity them. Bellow had a habit of writing repeatedly about flying, partly, I used to think, because it was the great obvious advantage he had over his dead competitors, those writers who had never seen the world from above the clouds: Melville, Tolstoy, Proust. And how well he does it! In sentence after sentence the world is captured with brimming novelty: Newark seen as "sketchy" and "trembling in fiery summer"; the jet "running with concentrated fury to take off" (a phrase that, with its unpunctuated onrush, itself enacts such a concentrated fury); New York, which, as the plane tilts, "leaned gigantically seaward" (say the phrase to yourself, and see how the words themselves—"leaned gigan-tic-ally sea-ward"—elongate the experience so that the very language embodies the queasiness it describes); the dainty, unexpected rhythm of "The Hudson green within green, and rough with tide and wind" ("green within green" captures very precisely the different shades of green that we see in water when several thousand feet above it); and finally, "sailing in atmosphere"—isn't that exactly what the freedom of flight feels like? And yet, until this moment, one did not have these words—the best words, the right words in the right order—to fit this feeling. Until this moment, one was comparatively inarticulate; until this moment, one had been blandly inhabiting a deprived eloquence.

How, exactly, does one thank a writer for this? Fifteen years ago, at the age of 24, when I was working for *The Guardian* in London, I did so the only way I knew how: I arranged to meet Bellow and interviewed him for that newspaper. Over the years, I wrote about him again and again and visited him whenever I could. By happy accident, I co-taught a class with him at Boston University. My daughter played with his; our family became close to Bellow and his wife Janis, and to his devoted assistant, Will. I accompanied him on the piano when he played the recorder. It was a delight to talk to him about literature, to make him laugh—he would throw his head back and give out a distinctive chortle, "ha, ha, ha, ha," each laugh separately articulated—and to laugh with him when he was making a joke.

But I cannot say that I truly knew him (partly because I knew him only in his old age); and, in some ways, the human distance was of my making, not his, for my literary gratitude was literally unspeakable, and floated massively above us. The prose was what I truly knew before I knew the man, and always I felt magically indebted in his presence. Like anyone, writers, of course, are embarrassed by excessive praise, just as readers are burdened by their excessive gratitude—one cannot keep going on about it. And, eventually, it is easier to turn the beloved literary work into a kind of disembodied third party: to admit that the work itself exceeds the writer, that it sails—sails in atmosphere, indeed!—away from the writer and toward the delighted reader. In the final year of Saul's life, as he became very frail, I would read some of his own prose to him; something he would doubtless have found, as a younger man, mawkish or cloying or tiresome. It did not feel any of those things, as Bellow sat there in forgetful frailty; rather it felt as if I were gently reminding him of his own talent and that he was grateful for this, and perhaps grateful for my gratitude. But, in truth, I could not thank him enough when he was alive, and I cannot now. ■

Peter Ackerman's quest to topple tyranny.

Regime Change, Inc.

BY FRANKLIN FOER

When the Rose Revolution began in the fall of 2003, there was little reason to hope for a happy ending. Twelve years earlier, the former Soviet Republic of Georgia had stepped from communism into civil war. The old Communist eminence Eduard Shevardnadze may have brought greater stability when he took over the government in 1992, but his corrupt rule also generated huge new pools of ill will among the populace. Some of this disgust manifested itself in small, peaceful street protests. But it was also expressed in aborted mutinies and failed assassination attempts on the despot, meaning that, over the post-Soviet era, the peaceful and the violent commingled, leading to bloody crackdowns.

As the Rose Revolutionaries, a group of liberal dissidents, prepared to campaign against Shevardnadze, their leaders vowed to introduce a new culture of resistance better suited to a nation that had lost patience with the cycle of uprising and repression. The movement would tolerate no guns. Its leaders studied the methods of American civil

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A Homeland for the Palestinians?

Why they? How about all those others?

The need and justification of a "Palestinian homeland" has been repeated so often and so insistently that people all over the world have come to accept it as an inevitability. That "homeland," it is generally agreed, would consist of the Gaza Strip and most of Judea/Samaria, generally referred to as the "West Bank." Even many good people in the U.S. and even our president, a well-intentioned man, advocate a "homeland," a Palestinian state, at the end of the so-called "road map."

What are the facts?

An unwarranted request. There is no such thing as a "Palestinian people." That is a concept that, by the drumbeat of incessant propaganda, has been foisted on the world. The so-called Palestinians are the same Arabs that live in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Never at any time in history did the "Palestinians" have a homeland, nor did they ever demand one.

In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly voted to set up both a Jewish and an Arab state within the borders of the territories. The Arabs were allotted three contiguous areas and the enclave of the city of Jaffa. The Jews were allotted three discontiguous areas. Jerusalem was to be an international city. In order to get their homeland, the Jews reluctantly accepted the unfavorable deal. The Arabs rejected it out of hand and instead invaded the nascent Jewish state with the armies of six nations. The ragtag Jewish forces decisively defeated the aggressors and stayed in control of most of the area. Egypt retained control of the Gaza Strip, and Jordan occupied Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank"). Had the Arabs accepted the United Nations partition plan, they would have had their "Palestinian homeland" for almost 60 years. They spurned the opportunity when it was available to them.

> "...an independent homeland for the Palestinians is unwarranted because the Palestinians are not a distinct people... and because its creation... would be an existential threat to Israel."

For nineteen years, until the Six-Day War, the territories involved were under the control of Jordan and Egypt. Never during those years was there ever a demand for a "Palestinian homeland." Only after the Six-Day War in 1967, when the territories reverted to Israeli control, did the insistent clamor for a "Palestinian homeland" arise.

Although the Israelis would probably be glad to get rid of those bothersome and rebellious people, it is regrettably not that simple. The declared goal of the Arabs, a goal never rescinded, is the destruction of Israel. Were they granted an independent state, it would geographically and strategically dominate all of Israel. Within a very short time, this "Palestinian homeland" would be bristling with the most advanced weaponry, in all likelihood including weapons of mass destruction. Arab armies would be invited to participate in what they would hope to be the final onslaught against Israel and against the hated Jews.

How about other nationalities that yearn for a homeland, for their own state? There are first of all the Basques, the vast majority of whom live in the northwestern region of Spain. They are a unique people, with a language and a culture that has no relationship to anything else in the world. They have been fighting to become liberated. But Spain – most vociferous in the promotion of a "Palestinian homeland" – refuses that. An independent Basque homeland would not endanger Spain in any way. But does the world, does the UN support the Basques in their quest for independence? Of course not!

Or take the Kurds. They are a distinct group. They live in a land that is part of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Armenia. They have been fighting for independence for centuries, but it has never been granted. An independent Kurdestan would not endanger the countries that now occupy it. But does the world, does the UN support the Kurds in their quest for independence? Of course not!

And then there are the Tibetans. They are a distinct people, unique in language and religion. They have been annexed by China, which has flooded the country with its "settlers." The Chinese are fully in the process of making Tibet into an integral part of China. Clearly, an independent Tibet would not be any existential threat to China. But does the world, does the UN support the Tibetans in their quest for independence? Of course not!

The quest for an independent homeland for the Palestinians is unwarranted because the Palestinians are not a distinct people which never had or even claimed such a homeland, and because the creation of such a homeland would be an existential threat to Israel. Both the world and especially the Europeans don't really care about self-determination – they don't lose any sleep over the Basques, the Kurds, the Tibetans or others who yearn for a homeland. They care about their own political and economic interests, which they cloak in the language of political morality. And of course, there are quite a few who wouldn't shed a tear if, at the end of the day, Israel were indeed wiped from the face of the earth.

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rights activists and dog-eared the writings of Harvard University researcher Gene Sharp, a theorist of nonviolent struggle. For a time, this strategy nurtured a fledgling movement with a few hundred adherents. But, as the movement grew, its grip on its followers became more tenuous. Demonstrations swelled into large, angry throngs that had no knowledge of the Nashville sit-ins and zero familiarity with Sharp. Once again, the threat of violence loomed. "Our revolution happened so quickly. Everything became spontaneous," one of the movement's leaders, Giorgi Meladze, told me. "That's where the film came in."

The film is *Bringing Down a Dictator*, a documentary that describes how the Serbian student group, Otpor, toppled Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. It had inspired and guided the Georgian democrats' leader, Mikhail Saakashvili, now the country's president. (Otpor, after all, had launched the bloodless revolution par excellence—a combination of clever marketing and deft courtship of the Serbian police.) And, as the Rose Revolution approached critical mass and mob violence threatened, the film took on an elevated mission. It became a prime vehicle for indoctrinating the growing crowds in the principles of nonviolent struggle. Every Saturday for months, the independent TV network Rustavi 2 broadcast *Bringing Down a Dictator*, followed by a segment in which Georgians would discuss the film's implications for their own movement. In the ten frenetic days leading up to Shevardnadze's collapse, the network increased the frequency of broadcasts. And, when Shevardnadze surrendered power without a bullet fired, the Georgians weren't selfish in acknowledging credit. One leader told *The Washington Post*, "Most important was the film. All the demonstrators knew the tactics of the revolution in Belgrade by heart because they showed [the film]. ... Everyone knew what to do."

Bringing Down a Dictator wasn't produced by Freedom House, the National Democratic Institute, or any of the other familiar NGOs that promote democracy. Instead, it originated with Peter Ackerman, a financier who made his fortune working alongside junk-bond king Michael Milken. Ackerman evangelizes on behalf of a specific theory of regime change. He calls it nonviolent conflict. Unlike Gandhi, Ackerman's affection for nonviolence has nothing to do with the tactic's moral superiority. Movements that make a strategic decision to eschew violence, he argues, have a far better record of toppling despots than violent revolutions. He has outlined these views in two books he co-wrote and two films he co-produced. In 2002, he joined with a college chum, a public television executive named Jack DuVall, to create the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC). The Center has translated Ackerman's material into eight languages, paid to disseminate it around the globe, and taught his techniques in seminars with activists from Iran, Iraq, and Palestine. Visiting Ackerman's office over the course of several months, I witnessed a pilgrimage of activists from Central Asia hoping to glean nonviolent know-how.

The Rose Revolution—and the nonviolent movements it inspired in Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and, to a lesser extent, Lebanon—represented a vindication for Ackerman and his ideas. And, in Washington at least, they needed it. According to his friends, when Ackerman began hawking the principles of nonviolent struggle to government bureaucrats and think-tank wonks three years ago, much of officialdom considered him a dilettante. His friend and admirer Azar Nafisi, the author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, recalls, "I remember him talking to a group more politically seasoned. They were clearly thinking this guy is really off-base: 'We're talking about more serious stuff than you.' " But, suddenly, the zeitgeist has turned in Ackerman's direction. Now some of the same officials who dismissed him have become his boosters. The State Department has distributed his videos to anti-Castro dissidents in Cuba (a fact Ackerman didn't know until the regime arrested some of these dissidents two years ago and charged them with possessing his films). When some of State's desk officers don't want to create international incidents by advising activists on how to overthrow governments, they gently suggest visiting Ackerman, who has fewer qualms about lending a helping hand.

The State Department has begun paying attention to Ackerman for a good reason: His tactics are suited to the current political climate. The wars against Saddam Hussein and the Taliban have exhausted the U.S. appetite for forcible regime change. At the same time, the goal of promoting democracy in the Middle East and Central Asia remains. To be sure, there is a slew of NGOs that advise and finance democratic activists, but they specialize in working with movements as they approach full bloom—especially as elections near. In places like Iran, however, there are few vibrant movements to foster. That's where Ackerman has found his niche.

A FEW MONTHS ago, I visited Ackerman in his spacious corner office at the top of a Pennsylvania Avenue building just up the street from the World Bank. Ackerman's Prada parka and winter tan remind you that you're not in tattered NGO-land anymore. You're in the presence of wealth. (When he's not thinking about regime change, Ackerman invests in start-ups like Fresh Direct, a service that delivers Umbrian olive oil and foie gras to New York City gourmands.) Ackerman, who looks uncannily like *Jaws* actor Roy Scheider, has a reputation for gabbing at considerable length. "I don't know if you've had any success getting him to stop talking," one of his acquaintances quipped. In our meeting, he maintained an implacable flow of theories, historical analogies, and business school jargon, swerving from the sixteenth-century French political theorist Étienne de la Boétie to obscure corners of Indonesian politics.

It's a fitting conversational style for a man whose biography similarly twists and turns. By the time he graduated from Colgate University in 1968, he had already strayed from his middle-class Jewish roots, storming an administration building in protest and chauffeuring Stokley

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The nonviolent Serb resistance, Otpor, rallies in Belgrade in 2000.

Carmichael around campus. But his flirtation with radicalism was brief. He felt more comfortable hewing to a conventional political path and became head of the College Democrats' New York state chapter. College shaped him in another profound way, too. Studying comparative religion, he developed an interest in Christian Science and converted.

After Colgate, Ackerman joined a graduate program at Tufts University's Fletcher School, where he met Harvard's Gene Sharp, the academic who would become his mentor. Although Sharp's stiff writing and soft-spoken demeanor prevented him from developing much cachet, his heterodox scholarship inspired a small but devoted following. At a time when Susan Sontag was visiting Hanoi and Che Guevara was becoming a T-shirt icon, Sharp challenged the romantic image enshrouding Third World revolutionaries. Marxists, he contended, misunderstood the nature of power. They asserted that oppressive regimes survive because they monopolize violence in their societies. But Sharp, borrowing from Hannah Arendt and Max Weber, argued that regimes can survive only if they obtain the consent of society. "Obedience is the heart of political power," Sharp wrote. If even the most authoritarian regimes depended on consent for survival, it followed that citizens could topple them simply by withdrawing their consent.

Ackerman spent eight on-and-off years at Tufts refining Sharp's thesis. Studying the ill-fated Russian Revolution of 1905 and Gandhi's uprising against the British, he tried to discern why some nonviolent movements succeed and others fail. His answer wasn't terribly surprising or complicated: Successful movements plan carefully and set limited, achievable goals.

Unfortunately, Ackerman obtained his PhD in 1976 during a deep trough in the academic job market. With bills to pay, he joined Drexel Burnham Lambert, an investment bank where he had once spent a stint as an assistant to the firm's president. Intellectuals didn't exactly fit Drexel's culture, and his style rubbed some colleagues the wrong way. According to the journalist James B. Stewart's book on Drexel's fall, *Den of Thieves*, Ackerman was known by the moniker "the Sniff"—he had his head so far up his boss' rear end. But Milken, one of the firm's brightest stars, took pleasure in bucking the firm's ethos and glomming onto unlikely whizzes. He recruited Ackerman to work as a trader in the firm's Beverly Hills office.

Before Milken and his firm began their well-documented plunge, Ackerman made a killing. *BusinessWeek* called him the highest-paid of Milken's minions. In 1988, he put together Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co.'s zeitgeist-defining leveraged buyout of RJR Nabisco. Ackerman pocketed $165 million from the $26 billion deal. When Milken ultimately took his tumble, Ackerman didn't follow him. Unlike most of his colleagues, he had only limited dealings with the venal investor Ivan Boesky, so he never had the firm's biggest cloud of insider trading hanging over him. Even though he contributed $80 million to Drexel's settlement with the government, Ackerman walked away from the disaster with few scars and a net worth of about $500 million. The financial press began referring to his "Teflon" coating.

Just before the height of the Drexel scandals in 1989, Ackerman decamped to London. And, once in London, he decamped from the world of finance. He returned to his academic roots and holed up at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, where he boiled down his 1,100-page dissertation into a more accessible manuscript. There are many obvious reasons for this career swap: escape from the stench of Drexel, midlife crisis, a shot at redemption. (His wife, the novelist Joanne Leedom-Ackerman, hints at these anxieties in her book *The Dark Path to the River*, whose protagonist's angst-ridden husband bears a striking resemblance to Ackerman.) But he also returned to Sharp's teachings out of intellectual devotion. Sidney Tarrow, a Cornell political scientist who has studied Ackerman's work, told me, "He genuinely believes in this, the same way that people believe in Marxism."

Ackerman admits that the resulting book, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*, didn't set the world on fire. "I had to give 2,000 copies to my best friends to sell the book out. I'd say to them, 'What did you think?' They'd say, 'It's sitting on my night table below my John LeCarré novel,' which means, 'Never speak to me about this subject again.' " After his book's publication in 1994, he quietly returned stateside to resume investing. But, to Ackerman's surprise, the book acquired new life. Ackerman collaborated on a PBS documentary, *A Force More Powerful*, which aired in 2000, based on the book's historical narratives of movements. The filmmaking bug infested him. He followed his debut with a sequel following Otpor, the anti-Milosevic student activists who attracted Ackerman's attention when they began rigorously training in Sharp's methods in 1999.

Otpor would become the textbook example of Sharp's theories translated into praxis. The movement had united a querulous opposition, herding ultra-nationalists and social democrats toward a single obtainable goal: free and fair elections. They had intentionally scattered their followers

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across Yugoslavia's provinces, not confining them to metropolises like Belgrade and Novi Sad. That way, the regime couldn't easily stamp them out. And they had heeded Sharp's chief injunction: They had cultivated the police and military. Otpor sent flowers to soldiers. Every demonstration used humor to convince police it meant them no physical harm. As Ackerman and DuVall wrote in a recent op-ed, "Regimes fall when their defenders defect."

Ackerman and his collaborator, Steve York, won a Peabody Award for their chronicle of Milosevic's downfall. And, soon after it aired, they began fielding requests for copies from dissidents. (Ackerman won't say how he ships copies: "Let me just say, I have no inhibition using any method that's nonviolent to get these movies to their destinations.") When activists received the movie, they assumed that ICNC could help them replicate the Serbs' feats. "They would come to us and ask, 'How do we do the same thing, and how do we get training?' " Ackerman says. Of course, NGOs like Freedom House and the National Endowment for Democracy have been in the business of training dissidents for years. But, following the example of other businessmen who have entered the world of politics, Ackerman brashly believed that he could invent a new, more efficient methodology for reaching the same old goals. He hired a small staff and began brainstorming how to overthrow the world's dictators.

As with Ross Perot, his fellow entrepreneur-turned-politico, there are moments when Ackerman seems to drift into an alternate reality. Addressing a State Department group last year, he described a scheme for providing a communications infrastructure to North Korean dissidents: "Let's say you drop 10,000 boxes or distributed [them] somehow in North Korea. The boxes contain the following: 100 feet of string, a balloon, a helium canister and microwave devices, radio devices that can communicate. Tie the string to the tree. Tie the other end of the string to the balloon. Attach the electronic device to the balloon, stick the helium canister in the balloon, break it. The balloon rises 100 feet in the air, and you have an unlimited number of transmission towers. Provide in addition the ability to transmit with devices, handheld devices—suddenly you have an interesting opportunity."

But the North Korean balloons are a daydream that he has hardly pursued. His most important plan relies slightly less on Willy Wonka methodology. For the last two years, the ICNC has developed a curriculum that can be taught to aspiring regime changers that helps them understand the topography of political power, systematically identify regime weaknesses, and develop strategies to exploit them. Ackerman hired Otpor leaders to write a first draft. In part, the curriculum is designed to be taught in seminars, some of which he intends to hold in distance learning centers scattered around the world. But Ackerman also plans to post it on the Internet as a downloadable PowerPoint document. "In its ideal forum," Ackerman explains, "it's a pyramid marketing scheme."

To test and tweak his curriculum, Ackerman has thrown himself into live conflicts. He has arranged sessions in which Bob Helvey, another protégé of Sharp and one of Otpor's gurus, has trained activists from Iran, Iraq, and countries Ackerman won't name. (Ackerman has vowed confidentiality to his trainees.) He sent another trainer to Palestine to spend twelve days creating a nonviolent vanguard to challenge Hamas. Ackerman claims to advise only activists who ask for his help. But there are a handful of cases where he hasn't shied away from playing the part of impresario. Over the last few years, he has held conferences hosting activists from around the world—bringing triumphant veterans of the struggles against Augusto Pinochet and South African apartheid to meet colleagues from ongoing struggles, like those in Burma and Zimbabwe. Last summer, he brought activists from more than a dozen countries to a retreat in the Montreal suburbs for a week of solidarity and study. "We can't say where they are from. But think of the 20 biggest assholes in the world, and you can guess," he says. A government consultant who attended one of these events described it as the nonviolent movement's answer to the Socialist International and compared it to comics in which superheroes join in a broad alliance. "I looked around the room and thought, 'This is the Hall of Justice.' "

Of all Ackerman's whiz-bang ideas, he's most enamored with the development of a video game named after *A Force More Powerful* that allows players to practice their dictator-toppling skills virtually. On a winter morning, I went to a suburban Baltimore office park to play a beta version. Ackerman has spent $3 million outsourcing the project to a company called BreakAway Games, which helped produce the popular *Civilization* series. Its offices were creepily quiet. Rows of cubicles held programmers, many of whom worked with earphones. Not that there were many distractions to filter. All the shades were drawn. Glowing monitors and a few desk lamps provided the room with its only light. I crammed into one of the cubicles with the game's two lead programmers.

To provide insights into the mind of the dictator, Ackerman sent Otpor veterans to consult with BreakAway, and you could see their influence in the game's Serb flair. The opening screen showed a map of a generic Balkan country with towns named after Darko Milicic and other Serbian NBA players. I clicked on a town, providing an overhead view of buildings and streets. A message informed me that a student leader of my movement had been imprisoned. My immediate task, the game told me, was to free him.

A panel on the bottom of the screen showed four movement leaders. I clicked on an icon, triggering a flow chart that illustrated their organizational relationship. Another graphic showed the relative strengths and weaknesses of the leaders, each rated for intangibles like creativity and enthusiasm for the cause. On the side of the screen, a bank account showed my resources. At the moment, my movement didn't look very strong at all.

For my first move, I had a range of options. I could send a

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leader to Washington to raise cash from NGOs, but that would cost valuable time. I could distribute flyers in front of the radio station, in hopes of winning the station's manager to our cause. Unfortunately, the movement had a paucity of competent writers. To boost flagging morale, I could hold a rock concert. That, however, would drain my measly treasury. In the end, I quixotically sent a comrade to shout slogans in the face of the supreme leader himself. The game told me that the action had increased my movement's visibility, which seemed good. Except the regime had also taken notice of us, making arrests and harassment infinitely more likely.

Ackerman has tremendously high hopes for this game. When *A Force More Powerful* is released this fall, the ICNC plans to distribute it gratis on the Internet. It won't just be translated into foreign languages. It will be configured to fit specific local circumstances. For example, a Belarusan teen might play a version with instantly recognizable Minsk street scenes. The flunkies of his dictator, Aleksandr Lukashenko, would be the very same goons who have staved off regime opponents for a decade. Ackerman has designed the game with such specificity because he believes it will light the imagination of dissidents. Over lunch, he told me, "This game should help activists discern what goals they should [set] and in what sequence. It will help them determine what tactics they should take."

The idea of a regime-change video game is easy to laugh at. Ackerman seems to understand this. That's why he has outsourced the project to BreakAway, a firm that also designs artificial intelligence–run war games for the Pentagon. A BreakAway flack handed me flyers touting video simulations that allow sailors to execute counterterrorism operations and drivers to steer convoys through insurgent-infested terrain. *A Force More Powerful* borrows extensively from templates that American battlefield commanders use to develop strategy. It demands that players outline their plans in detail before executing maneuvers, which is really the primary point of the game: to put activists in a strategic mindset where they stop improvising and reacting.

In other words, the game may be intended to inspire movements, but it tries hard to avoid the impression that revolutions are easy. It rewards players for setting modest objectives—like winning the confidence of radio station managers and freeing jailed comrades—before focusing on the grand prize of regime change. The programmers have also injected an element of randomness into the game. You can play it three times with the same strategy and obtain three different results. Dictators, after all, aren't known for their moral consistency or steady behavior.

WHEN *A Force More Powerful* is finished, it will be translated into Farsi. "Imagine if you had 10,000 Iranians playing this game," Ackerman told me, pausing to allow the implications of his pronouncement to sink in. And, if the game doesn't inspire a revolution, Ackerman has several ideas for pushing the country in that direction. Three years ago, his films were translated into Farsi, with a voice-over from Nader Sadighi, a well-known newscaster from prerevolutionary times. For a brief moment, if you received the Los Angeles–based Iranian satellite networks, you couldn't avoid Ackerman productions. "One day, a station might broadcast a segment on Poland; the next day, you'll be watching Channel One and see a segment on Chile," Sadighi told me, referring to episodes from Ackerman's first documentary on nonviolence. Ackerman's films became the talk of Tehran—touted in student blogs and condemned in the hard-line paper *Baztab*.

More recently Ackerman has stepped up his involvement. He worked with Bob Helvey to train Iranian-Americans, many of whom worked for Reza Pahlavi, the son of the deposed shah. Azar Nafisi has introduced him to the Iranian human rights community. And the ICNC has made some preliminary contacts with the referendum movement—the most broad-based and promising of the opposition coalitions, uniting monarchists, communists, and Islamists behind a simple demand for a vote on the regime's future. According to his friends, Ackerman and his circle have begun to kick around creative ideas for challenging the mullahs. What if every Iranian withdrew money from the ATMs at once, overwhelming the country's financial system? What if they boycotted state-run industries? Ultimately, he envisions events unfolding as they did in Serbia, with a small, well-trained, nonviolent vanguard introducing the idea of resistance to the masses. These ideas may not have gone very far yet, but they have caught the attention of the Iranian government. Last year, the Ministry of Guidance brashly called Ackerman's office, requesting copies of his videos and writings. "I guess that's one way to do intelligence," Ackerman jokes.

If Ackerman hasn't yet been able to make more headway, it is because he has slammed up against the same reality as the Bush administration. For all the noise the White House has made about aiding the forces of democracy in Iran, those forces are maddeningly hard to find. The regime has crushed and demoralized many of its best-organized opponents. Without any quick and easy routes to regime change, Bush has focused on stopping Iran's nuclear program. Until a better policy emerges, Ackerman's program provides a useful interim approach. His style of movement-building requires a relative pittance. It makes no promises about quick results, acknowledging that the climate within Iran might take years to reach a revolutionary state. And, if there's no thriving movement, it offers a playbook that can help build one from scratch. But, for all this realism, he begins with the most idealistic assumptions. When Ackerman finished explaining his Iranian approach to me, he cocked his head at an angle. Even though he makes silky presentations, he sounded almost frustrated, as if he couldn't believe that the rest of the world didn't appreciate the obviousness of his ideas. He exhaled deeply. "Just because it looks hard doesn't mean it's not worth trying." ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

French Affair

IT'S BECOMING AN ACCEPTANCE, or at least is treated as one. Extramarital sex is hardly a new idea in film, but now it is so much a matter of course in screenplays that the very word "adultery" begins to look as if it were knitted in lavender. Recently we had the American *We Don't Live Here Anymore* and the British *Closer*; now from France comes **HAPPILY EVER AFTER.** And those three are only samples. The difference between this current crop and the philanderings of the past is the new films' assumption that the viewer will understand and nod. (Query: is there a female equivalent for the word "philanderer"? It is needed now.)

HAPPILY EVER AFTER (Kino)

LOOK AT ME (Sony Pictures Classics)

In past films, sex outside marriage ranged on a temperature scale from deep drama to comic naughtiness. Sometimes there was that creaky "advanced" approach—open marriage, which was not quite the same thing because outside activity was agreed on between spouses. Not now: affairs proliferate, but they are generally hidden, or are meant to be. These latest films imply that we all acknowledge a basic fact: the conventions of marriage are distinct from the truth of impulse and desire and even love; and people of sophistication accept this split, accept this truth, instead of the old-time rhetoric. Always there have been more secrets in more marriages than were visible, but the revelation of those secrets wasn't widely wanted. Films nowadays—a good many of them, anyway—are telling us to face up.

The screenplay of *Happily Ever After* is by Yvan Attal, who also directed and plays a leading role. He did the same in *My Wife Is an Actress*, in which his writing and directing were as supple as they continue to be here. This new film focuses on two thirtyish Paris couples and a single man. The bachelor, Alain Cohen, has a fantastic amorous life, which adds to the discomfort of the two husbands, Vincent (Attal) and Georges (Alain Chabat). Vincent particularly is interested in variety, and his wife Gabrielle, aware of his feelings, reconsiders her own life. (She is played—as was the actress in the previous picture—by Charlotte Gainsbourg, Attal's actual partner.) Their marriage is not a bad one: it is merely no longer fiery, which of course is as true for her as it is for him.

The most important aspect of the stories about all five characters is the way they are told. Attal and his editor Jennifer Augé have found an attractive playful style: they never let the stories rest, almost juggling them, and keep them gamboling before us. We soon feel that the ultimate statement of Attal's theme is the way we are seeing the film. Its very manner is a comment on the flexibilities in contemporary morality.

Attal, whose third directing job this is, is an adroit actor. Gainsbourg is not irresistibly appealing but is authentic enough. To indulge in the familial: she is the daughter of Jane Birkin, the Anglo-French actress who first came to attention in Antonioni's *Blow-Up*. More film-world twinings: Vincent's mother and father are played by Anouk Aimée, a goddess of the past who now does grandmothers, and Claude Berri, director of the superb duo derived from Marcel Pagnol, *Jean de Florette* and *Manon of the Spring*.

An American film reference, too. Gabrielle is a real estate agent, and near the end she meets a new client to show him an apartment. He is played by Johnny Depp. They get in a tiny slow elevator, and after a few floors have passed, they are kissing. The elevator continues up. At the film's finish it is still going up.

Another French film, **LOOK AT ME,** is a different sort of family affair. It was written by Agnès Jaoui and her former husband Jean-Pierre Bacri: both of them play leading roles, and Jaoui directed. (They have worked together before.) Their screenplay operates under what we might call a European license: that is, a film doesn't need to have a plot, serious or light; it just has to follow some engaging people around for a while and, most importantly, use candor—European candor, we might say—about what they do and think. Many a foreign film has been made under this rubric, and even a few American ones, too (*Coffee and Cigarettes*, for instance).

Most of the people in *Look at Me* are interesting, even congenial, possibly because we recognize that, in effect, we have met them in previous films, whatever their names and occupations have been, and we would like to see what they are up to this time. Bacri plays a novelist-publisher, quite successful, whose writing is in a dry spell. He has a young wife, who is possibly nearing the end of the marital tether. Their conditions motivate matters. Bacri has a friend—another novelist, less successful—whose wife, Sylvia, played by Jaoui, is a voice teacher. One of her students is Lolita, the twenty-year-old daughter of Bacri and his first wife. The elements mix.

Many scenes are cleanly incised and are either sharply taciturn or pointedly verbose. All the neat Gallic use of restaurants and cafés, of country-house meals, is well featured. The whole film could slip by pleasantly, like lovely scenery watched through a train window, except for two matters. First, Lolita is overweight and goes through agonies of embarrassment and disappointment because of her shape. Her plight is credible enough but exceedingly trite film fare. Her story seems like a strand from a corny American film slipped into France. Point two is less avoidable and more cruel. Sylvia's voice students perform such lovely music in class and in concert—Monteverdi, Verdi, Schubert—that its mere presence makes the film seem thin. Especially Schubert's "An die

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Musik"—sung at the beginning and end of the film—which is so exquisite that we wonder why we are bothering with this picture. When Visconti used a scene from *Il Trovatore* to start *Senso*, he was introducing a film of substance to which Verdi was complementary. Schubert has nothing to do with Jaoui.

Still, she directs with flow and affection, and she plays Sylvia sensitively. Bacri has the right middle-aged assortment of humors. With Marilou Berry, who is the fleshy Lolita, any opinion of the performance is shaded by a perennial question. How does an actress feel when she is playing a role in which she is meant to be unattractive—and has been cast in the part for that reason? ■

ROBERT BRUSTEIN ON THEATER

Impersonations

INFATUATED WITH ROUSSEAU'S notion that the identifying mark of genius is the refusal to imitate, we sometimes fail to appreciate the crucial relationship between art and impersonation. Aristotle certainly understood it. Instead of insisting that the road to inspiration was paved with originality, he famously described tragedy as "the imitation of an action." And while the *Poetics* doesn't say much about actors impersonating characters, Aristotle certainly believed in some form of histrionic imitation as the root of the dramatic event. The best performers, however, are not duplicating machines or celebrity impressionists, turning out convincing likenesses of someone else's voice, gait, and gestures; they reproduce the essence of another human being in order to capture an interior underlying spirit.

SPAMALOT
(Sam S. Shubert Theatre)

ORSON'S SHADOW
(Barrow Street Theater)

JULIUS CAESAR
(Belasco Theater)

Three new productions either benefit or suffer from their approaches to impersonation. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT,** the latest Broadway mega-hit, is, like that other long-running blockbuster *The Producers*, a musical impersonation of a cult movie. The central copyist of the musicalized *Producers* was its Hollywood auteur Mel Brooks, who provided book, lyrics, music, and inspiration for the Broadway show. In the case of *Spamalot* (a lumpish pun not worthy of the Python wit), the responsibilities are split—rather like the style of the musical itself. Eric Idle is listed as chief begetter, but there is no question that *Spamalot*'s director, Mike Nichols, deserves a goodly share of honors. Idle, who wrote the book and the lyrics, is the only authentic Python in the project, though John Cleese gets a chance to simulate the Voice of God (on tape), and the show's composer, John Du Prez, once wrote additional music for another Python movie, *Life of Brian*. In fact, the most memorable song in the show is lifted from that movie—the oft-reprised "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life," originally sung by two cheerful thieves during their crucifixion on Calvary.

As expected, the audience is so familiar with *Spamalot*'s film source—*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, of course—that howls of glee arise at the appearance of characters such as the French Taunter ("I fart in your general direction"). The same tumultuous response greets the "Bring Out Your Dead" episode (where plague victims are piled onto a cart before they have actually expired) and that precious moment when the nasal "Knights Who Say Ni" materialize on stage, squeaking for a "shrubbery."

This mass hysteria is a relatively recent phenomenon. When the aerialists of the Flying Circus brought an anthology to the New York stage about thirty years ago, they couldn't even fill the City Center for a revue that included such classics as "The Parrot," "The Argument," and "The Lumberjack Song." Today the Sam S. Shubert is sold out until virtually the next millennium. Given the contemporary audience's familiarity with every Python tic and inflection, the cast of *Spamalot* should be cited for bravery just for daring to step into the now legendary footwear of Palin, Chapman, Idle, Cleese, Jones, and Gilliam. But, except in cases where costume, makeup, and accents can be easily replicated, the actors have the good sense not to attempt to imitate the inimitable. Tim Curry, who played the simpering Mozart in the original Broadway production of *Amadeus*, takes over Graham Chapman's role of King Arthur and plays it with a sleepy look, thickening waist, and vaguely bemused demeanor. Like Chapman, he rides an imaginary horse throughout the show to the accompaniment of coconut clops provided by his squire Patsy (Michael McGrath, impersonating Terry Gilliam), but what he evokes is more a memory than a simulacrum.

Curry is one of the few cast members who doesn't double as another character. Hank Azaria (who also plays the French Taunter and a Knight of Ni) is delightful in Cleese's old role of Sir Lancelot, especially when his chain-mail armor is ripped from his body to reveal the flaming queen underneath this manly exterior. David Hyde Pierce, whose very name might be a Python invention, is quite becoming as the modest Sir Robin, a part originally played by Idle himself; Christopher Sieber relishes Michael Palin's Sir Galahad (though no one can match Palin's po-faced brand of offended innocence); and Steve Rosen is amusing as the "strangely flatulent" Sir Bedevere (originally played by Terry Jones). Let it also be noted regarding Gilliam that Tim Hatley's scenic and costume designs owe a considerable debt to the visual genius of this American-born Python, who designed all the troupe's surrealistic graphics. (God's huge animated hand and foot, for example, are lifted intact from the original TV show.)

Halfway through the production, the quest for the Holy Grail draws to an end when the actors find the bloody cup, and God sends them on a new journey. They are to wend their way a thousand years into the future to a land that has yet to be discovered, namely Broadway: "a very special place with people who can sing and dance, often at the same time." The only problem is that you can't have show business without Jews, and none of the medieval knights will admit that he is circumcised ("It's not the sort of thing you say to a heavily armed Christian"). Before long, however, the cast is donning Stars of David and doing a dance from *Fiddler on the Roof*.

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This is when Monty Python's wink-wink humor bows out and Mike Nichols's broader burlesque kicks in, with the star attraction of *Spamalot* emerging in the person of Sara Ramirez. An amply endowed Juilliard graduate with an outsize voice, Ramirez plays the Lady of the Lake, who bestows Excalibur upon Arthur before transforming into Lady Guinevere, who bestows herself upon him as his wife. Ramirez has a talent for caricaturing virtually every loudmouth who ever belted along the Great White Way, especially those imported from the United Kingdom by Andrew Lloyd Webber. (Sarah Brightman comes in for particular mockery, though Liza Minnelli, Patti LuPone, and Jennifer Holliday take some hits as well.)

It is Ramirez, usually surrounded by a bevy of nubile American showgirls, who re-routes *Spamalot* from an anarchic Monty Python romp into a show-biz satire not unlike *Forbidden Broadway*. We have an early hint of the schizoid nature of the production when a bespectacled professor parts the curtains to describe medieval England and the lights go up on a full set of Finland instead, followed by an entire production number of Finno-Ugric peasant dances—a good laugh, but one expensive enough to fund another Broadway show. When, later, the Round Table transforms into a roulette wheel, it is clear that Nichols has stopped cantering along the road to Camelot and is speeding over the interstate to Vegas. I wouldn't have been surprised to see the whole Strip represented on stage, including a brand-new hotel next to the Luxor and the Venetian called the Shtetl, with black-hatted croupiers presiding over gaming tables devoted to pinochle, hearts, and gin rummy. But hell, the whole thing is hugely entertaining, and there's enough great stuff left over from the original movie—the fantastic duel between Arthur and the Black Knight, who refuses to admit defeat even when all his limbs have been chopped off ("It's just a scratch"), the attack of the killer rabbit on Arthur's terrified knights—to make *Spamalot* a hilarious, if circuitous, nostalgia trip.

Austin Pendleton's **Orson's Shadow** is another act of impersonation, and a highly engrossing one. Set in 1960, when Orson Welles was performing at the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin, it begins on a darkened stage illuminated only by a ghost light, where the stammering celebrity-mad British theater critic Kenneth Tynan comes to visit the failing artist he still considers the great hope of the stage. Welles, at that time playing Falstaff in his own *Chimes at Midnight* (an adaptation of *Henry IV* that left out most of the history), is in the process of trying to match the fat knight in obesity and appetite, at the same time chewing up his once-illustrious career. In the hope of resurrecting Welles, Tynan would like him to direct Laurence Olivier in Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* at the Royal Court.

Tynan hasn't yet mentioned this idea to Olivier, nor has he informed the future director of the National Theatre about his ambition to be its literary director. That sets the scene for the second act, on the empty, darkened stage of the Royal Court. Tynan's chances of becoming Olivier's associate are not enhanced by his brutal reviews of Vivien Leigh's performances, particularly opposite her husband in *Antony and Cleopatra*. And although Olivier is in the process of leaving the promiscuous, tubercular, half-mad Leigh for his new love, Joan Plowright, he is still smarting over Tynan's treatment of the woman who inspired his most romantic performance (notably Lord Nelson in *That Hamilton Woman*).

If all this sounds like higher theatrical gossip, it probably is. But *Orson's Shadow* is written with such wit and sympathy, and it is performed with such warm insights into the anatomy of the actor's ego, that it makes for a funny, illuminating, and ultimately very touching evening. The play also chronicles an important transition in English theater history—when Olivier, prodded by Plowright and the Royal Court, was in a state of artistic evolution. Once considered a charter member of the "noble wobblies," as Jonathan Miller once called the mellifluous knights of the English theater, and accused by critics such as Tynan of turning *Henry V* into a scoutmaster pageant and *Hamlet* into a Joan Crawford movie, Olivier is now being nudged by the younger generation toward the new theater of the English Angries and the French Absurdists. He has already triumphed in *The Entertainer*. Now it is Welles's troublesome job to direct him in *Rhinoceros*.

Pendleton has done a lot of research on the period, and most of his facts are accurate. One could quarrel with the author's understanding of Tynan's sexual tastes, and the emphysema test we see administered to this chain smoker by a stagehand at the Royal Court was actually conducted one summer in the Martha's Vineyard home of William Styron. But these are small quibbles about a well-evoked series of episodes in theatrical history.

Pendleton also has the advantage of a cast, under David Cromer's direction, that has the capacity to impersonate without slavish imitation. Jeff Still wisely stays in shadow for most of his performance as El Monstro (as the great filmmaker was called); when he emerges, he looks less like Orson Welles than Raymond Burr, but he has the right oracular presence, wry humor, and outsize appetites. As for Kenneth Tynan as played by Tracy Letts (an actor who is also the gifted author of *Killer Joe* and *Bug*), he resembles Michael Caine more than the purple-shirted sage of Mayfair. But if Letts misses Tynan's dandified airs, he certainly catches his curious combination of malice, innocence, and fandom. And the scene between him and Vivien Leigh, two warring characters with badly infected chests sharing a cigarette, says everything about the relationship between nicotine and self-destruction.

A Change of Wind

On the eighth day he coined the word "alone"
and saw that it was as good as everything else.
A yellow school bus rattled down the lane,
a wind blew in a drainpipe, strong, mellifluous.

I brought two empty crates to the parking lot,
watched neighbors with briefcases and car keys.
At noon a mailman passed by where I sat
invisible, like a tree among trees.

Why, why, I asked. I wanted to know why,
but only scared a squirrel that dropped his acorn
when my voice broke silence unexpectedly—
a white noise in a wireless telephone.

My club soda went flat in the bottle. With a spit
of rain, a wind blew again from the lake.
I raised my index finger and touched it,
pleading, give me a break, give me a break.

KATIA KAPOVICH

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Playing Olivier is no job for an ordinary mortal, so John Judd's Larry can be forgiven for acting a little less elegant than his peerless model (his seedy costuming doesn't help much, either). But Susan Bennett's dynamic Joan and Lee Roy Rogers's distraught Vivien bring such eerie reality to their parts that they almost reincarnate the age. Rogers, her old cowboy-star name notwithstanding, bears an uncanny resemblance in looks, voice, and transparency to the delicately poised feline charmer she is playing. Watching her enact the "manic" phase of her madness, first dancing with a stagehand while humming the waltz from *Gone With the Wind*, then demanding to fuck him with her husband in the next room, is like seeing someone preparing to enter the first circle of shock-treatment hell. This is impersonation of a very high order, and so is Austin Pendleton's play.

JULIUS CAESAR at the Belasco suffers from the fact that virtually nobody in the cast knows how to impersonate. Most of them come from the world of television and the movies, where actors prosper mainly by playing themselves. Perhaps the one exception is the director, Daniel Sullivan, who seems to be impersonating Orson Welles's anti-fascist jackboot version of the play for the Mercury Theatre in 1937. The cast is led by the estimable Denzel Washington as Brutus, whose return to the stage seems to be the motivating—perhaps the only—reason for reviving the play on Broadway.

Welles used modern dress to raise consciousness about Mussolini. Sullivan uses modern dress to lower consciousness about Shakespeare. In this production, you rarely know where you are or how you got there. The Soothsayer is a homeless man pushing a shopping cart. The Romans are in business suits, being checked for weapons at the Senate door by security. (Brutus sneaks the knives through the metal detector in a briefcase.) After the assassination, they wage war in berets and fatigues, brandishing pistols and automatic weapons but committing suicide with their knives. Again, where are we and what are we doing here? The only time the production seems located is when it is cooking up a storm, since thunder and lightning know no chronology.

You can't help but admire Washington's willingness to return to the stage, but he doesn't find much to play in Brutus except his furrowed-brow decency. The part may not be active enough for him—too much thinking, too much hesitation, too many wrong choices for an actor who, in the movies, rarely makes a bad decision. And he doesn't know what to do with his soliloquies except rattle them off while looking vacantly at the sky. (A less naturalistic actor would have had a conversation with the audience.) The one time Washington smiles his charismatic smile, you forgive him everything. But he should have played Marc Antony, whose dialogue remains imprisoned in the clenched throat of an actor from HBO's *Oz* named Eamonn Walker. William Sadler approaches Caesar less like he's heading a government invading Gaul than like he's running a syndicate taking over the Roman waste-disposal industry. Kelly AuCoin's Octavius Caesar discusses military strategy with a wad of gum in his mouth. And Jessica Hecht's highly neurasthenic Portia seems to be bent on suicide the moment she walks on stage. There are some solid repertory-trained veterans around, such as Colm Feore playing an edgy Cassius, Jack Willis as a laconic Casca, and John Douglas Thompson as a fiery Flavius. But most of this huge cast of thrown-together strangers seems to have come not so much from another world as from another medium. Alas, it is a medium that doesn't care a lot about impersonation. ■

John Lewis Gaddis

After Containment

The legacy of George Kennan in the age of terrorism.

THE FIRST OF THE GIANTS OF American grand strategy during the Cold War lived to be the last of the giants. When George F. Kennan died a few weeks ago at the age of 101, none of his great contemporaries was left. Truman, Marshall, Acheson, Forrestal, Harriman, Bohlen, and Lovett had all preceded him in death years ago; and even Kennan's most formidable rival on matters of policy, his longtime friend Paul Nitze, died last fall at 97.

It is an appropriate moment, therefore, to assess what Kennan and his generation accomplished. For although great grand strategies are bounded by time and space, they also transcend time and space. They all arise, as the strategy of containment did, within particular periods, places, and sets of circumstances. And yet the adjective "great" implies relevance beyond context. It suggests that the strategy in question may serve as a guide in periods, places, and circumstances yet to come.

When Kennan returned to Washington in the spring of 1946, having riveted the attention of the United States government with the longest telegram ever sent from its embassy in Moscow, his first job was to design a course on strategy and policy at the National War College. "We found ourselves thrown back," he recalled, "on the European thinkers of other ages and generations: on Machiavelli, Clausewitz, Gallieni—even Lawrence of Arabia." Total war in a nuclear age would be "suicidal," but there was no American tradition of limited war. So it was necessary to explore other traditions: Montesquieu's view that "nations ought to do one another in peace the most good, in war—the least possible evil," or Gibbon's claim that the "temperate and inde-

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cisive conflicts" of the eighteenth century had been a strength rather than a weakness of that era. Kennan was relying here on the principle of transferability: that grand strategies from the past could suggest what to emulate and what to avoid in shaping grand strategies for the future.

It seems fair enough, then, to apply that standard to the strategy that Kennan himself devised after moving to the State Department early in 1947. To what extent might containment work in other periods, places, and sets of circumstances? Not at all, he seemed to suggest during the Vietnam War: "I emphatically deny the paternity of any efforts to invoke that doctrine today in situations to which it has, and can have, no proper relevance." The possibility that there could be strategies of containment—that his own strategy could spawn mutations of which he disapproved—left Kennan frustrated, apologetic, and often angry. The sensation, he recalled, was that of having "inadvertently loosened a large boulder from the top of a cliff and now helplessly witness[ing] its path of destruction in the valley below, shuddering and wincing at each successive glimpse of disaster."

By the end of the Cold War, however, the successes of containment had clearly outweighed its failures. There was no war with the Soviet Union, as there had been twice with Germany and once with Japan between 1914 and 1945. There was no appeasement either, as there had been in the years between the two world wars. Whatever the miscalculations, whatever the costs, the United States and its allies sustained a strategy that was far more consistent, effective, and morally justifiable than anything their adversaries were able to manage. Indeed, it is difficult to think of any peacetime grand strategy in which the results produced in the end corresponded more closely with the objectives specified at the beginning.

STUDENTS OF STRATEGY WILL therefore be studying containment for decades, even centuries, to come. Leaders will be applying its lessons in periods, places, and circumstances that nobody can now foresee. Transferability, however much Kennan resisted the notion, is unavoidable. But because the context can never again be that of the Cold War, not all aspects of that strategy are likely to transfer equally well.

Kennan himself suggested one such aspect: the requirement that the adversary to be contained share one's own sense of risk. Containment probably would not have succeeded against Napoleon or Hitler, he pointed out in 1947, because both gave themselves historical deadlines—determined presumably by their own mortality—for achieving their objectives. Sticking to timetables was more important to them than avoiding war. They lacked the caution that Marxism-Leninism had instilled in Soviet leaders: "the Kremlin is under no ideological compulsion to accomplish its purposes in a hurry," Kennan reminded the readers of *Foreign Affairs* that summer. Convinced that history was on their side, Stalin and his successors were prepared to be patient. And this bought the time that was needed for containment to demonstrate that they were wrong.

Nor is it clear that containment would have worked against states whose leaders believed in, as Sir Michael Howard has put it, "the inevitability of, and the social necessity for, armed conflict in the development of mankind." Such views were common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a fact that helps to explain how so many great powers could have blundered so easily in 1914 into a Great War. But that global conflict, and the one that followed in 1939, profoundly shook "bellicist" assumptions; and the use of atomic bombs in 1945 shattered them. Quite apart from the presence of a cautious adversary, therefore, there was in the postwar era a far more favorable psychological climate than had previously existed for developing measures, such as containment, short of war.

This sense of shared risk persisted throughout the Cold War, which is why the adjective remained attached to the noun. It did not matter whether Democrats or Republicans occupied the White House, or whether reformers or reactionaries inhabited the Kremlin: all feared a third world war. All had societies to defend and states to preserve. Total war had ceased to be a means by which those objectives could be accomplished, even if limited wars were still possible. It is hardly surprising, then, that Kennan and his war-college students read Clausewitz, for it was his great principle that the use of force must never become an end in itself: "The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose." No major leader during the Cold War would have disagreed.

That fact suggests a second limitation on containment's applicability beyond a Cold War context, which is that it was a state-based strategy. It depended not only on the fear of all-out war, but also on the existence of identifiable regimes that could manage the running of risks short of war. This, too, was consistent with Clausewitz: where else could the capacity to constrain force come from if not the state, the entity created, at the dawn of the modern era, to monopolize the means of violence? To imagine Clausewitz apart from the state is to imagine a boat without water. Might the same be said, then, of containment? Can that strategy function in an environment in which states are no longer the principal threats to be contained?

THE ATTACKS OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 posed that question for the United States in the starkest possible terms. The Bush administration was quick to conclude that Cold War strategies—containment and the deterrence that accompanied it—would not have worked against Al Qaeda. How does one contain someone who, before striking, is invisible? How does one deter someone who, in the act of striking, is prepared to commit suicide? These problems led Bush to announce a new grand strategy of pre-emption. The United States would henceforth act multilaterally where possible, but unilaterally where necessary, to destroy terrorists before they could hit their intended targets. The purpose was to defend states against stateless enemies.

But Bush's strategy was less of an innovation than at first it seemed to be. Pre-emption had never been ruled out during the Cold War. No American president, in a nuclear age, would have knowingly risked another Pearl Harbor. Nor was Al Qaeda an entirely stateless enemy. Osama bin Laden ran it from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, against which the Bush administration swiftly and successfully retaliated in the fall of 2001. Its first clear act of pre-emption also took place against a state, Iraq, in 2003. One purpose was to frighten the leaders of any other states who might be harboring terrorists or thinking about doing so: but that was deterrence, with a view to countering an anticipated danger. Pre-emption by the Bush administration's logic, then, led back to containment. It did not replace containment.

Yet there is another way of under-

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standing September 11 that might indeed make containment obsolete. It comes from claims that the attacks could only have occurred because of a diminished capacity on the part of *all* states to control what happened within their territories and across their borders. If September 11 initiated a new age of insecurity in which the actions of only a few individuals could endanger entire societies, then strategies of containment as traditionally conceived would be of little use. Containment presumed threats from states seeking to survive. It was never designed for movements seeking martyrdom. Preemption in such situations, the argument runs, may be the only feasible option.

A THIRD LIMITATION ON CONtainment's relevance beyond a Cold War context has to do with the persistence, throughout that conflict, of something obviously worse than American hegemony. It is clear in retrospect that the United States retained a preponderance of power—in all of the categories that constitute power—throughout the last half of the twentieth century. But it did so more often by invitation than by imposition: as long as the Soviet Union was the alternative, there was always something worse, in the eyes of most of the rest of the world, than the prospect of American domination. That minimized the "friction"—to use Clausewitz's term—that hegemony might otherwise have generated.

With the end of the Cold War, however, the unintended advantage that the Soviet Union had given the United States disappeared—as did the urgency of cultivating allies and neutrals who, if neglected, might defect to the other side, or at least threaten to do so. Multilateral consultation diminished steadily during the administrations of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, not because the principle was objectionable, but because the practice seemed less necessary than it had during the Cold War. George W. Bush's administration inherited unilateralism. It did not invent it.

But it certainly intensified unilateralism in several ways: through tactless diplomacy with respect to the Kyoto Protocol on global climate change, the International Criminal Court, and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty; through the casualness with which it brushed aside offers of help from NATO allies in invading Afghanistan; through its single-minded determination to overthrow Saddam Hussein despite widespread opposition within the international community; and through its reluctance to acknowledge, having conquered Iraq, that it had no clear idea what to do there. All of this led to an unprecedented loss of support throughout the rest of the world for the United States and its foreign policy objectives. The view seemed to be emerging that there could be nothing worse than American hegemony if it was to be used in this way.

If this trend continues, the basis for American power will indeed have shifted from invitation to imposition, a very different context from the one in which containment arose during the Cold War. When Kennan wrote in 1947 that "the United States need only measure up to its own best traditions," he assumed that those traditions would have greater appeal beyond American borders than would those of the Soviet Union and the international communist movement. He was right: the existence of such rivals provided an eminently realistic reason for Americans to respect their own ideals and to try to reflect them, for the most part successfully, in their actions. But if the United States now ceases to do that—if it creates a new tradition of imposed rather than invited power—then it should hardly be surprised to find little that might transfer from the strategy of containment that produced its own pre-eminence.

CONTAINMENT CANNOT BE EXpected to succeed, therefore, in circumstances that differ significantly from those that gave rise to it and sustained it, and within which it eventually prevailed. Kennan's objection to invoking it "in situations to which it has, and can have, no proper relevance," in this sense, makes sense. He never claimed that the pre-containment strategies he studied at the National War College could be wrenched from their historical contexts and applied uncritically in the early Cold War. And yet he obviously did believe in selective transferability: otherwise there would have been no point in studying the grand strategists of the past. It is worth considering, then, what aspects of containment might remain relevant in a post–Cold War, post–September 11 world.

One has to do with a kind of intellectual geography. Kennan's strategy of containment mapped out a path between dangerous—even deadly—alternatives. Despite the persistence of a multipolar international system, the dominant trend in thinking about strategy through the end of World War II had been one of bipolar extremes: war *or* peace, victory *or* defeat, appeasement *or* annihilation. The idea that there could be something in between—neither war *nor* peace, neither victory *nor* defeat, neither appeasement *nor* annihilation—had never been clearly articulated. It had been implicit, as Kennan noted, in the strategies of earlier eras, but it had disappeared with the advent of mass mobilizations, lethal technologies, and the total wars they made possible. Imagination itself had failed, making the first half of the twentieth century a period of unprecedented violence among the great powers. There seemed to be no middle ground.

The second half of the twentieth century turned out to be very different. Despite the emergence of a bipolar international system, the dominant trend in thinking about strategy was one of avoiding extremes. Nuclear weapons had something to do with this, but so did the idea of containment, which preceded the Soviet-American nuclear stalemate by almost a decade. When seen in this context, containment was a feat of imagination, made all the more impressive by the bleak circumstances in which it originated. The transferable lesson here is a psychological one: that any strategy in which the only choices available are deadly, dangerous, or otherwise undesirable requires re-thinking.

A second transferable principle follows: that enemies should be encouraged to defeat themselves. The idea goes back

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at least to Sun Tzu. It pervades Clausewitz. It is what Marx and Lenin expected would happen to capitalism, the internal contradictions of which were supposed to bring about its collapse. Both Kennan in the late 1940s and Reagan in the early 1980s reversed this logic, insisting that it was Marxism-Leninism, not capitalism, that carried within itself the seeds of its own destruction. The United States could, through its actions, increase the strains under which the Soviet Union and its allies operated; but in the end the inefficiencies of command economies, the absence of political accountability, and the improbability that an internationalist ideology could indefinitely suppress nationalist instincts would cause communism's demise.

Exploiting contradictions also makes sense in a post–September 11 era, because the interests of terrorists and those of the states that support them are not always the same. Terrorists have no economic program; states in an increasingly interdependent world must have one. Terrorists substitute intimidation for representation, a bargain that has not proved sustainable in a democratizing age. And states seek to survive even if terrorists do not: even rogue states have an interest in preserving the international state system, because they have no way of knowing what might replace it. These contradictions are at least as striking as the ones within the communist world of which the practitioners of containment took advantage, and over the past few months in the Middle East their consequences have become unmistakable.

How does one know, though, when such opportunities might arise? Answering this question brings up a third transferable principle from the strategy of containment, which is that history is more useful than theory in anticipating what is to come. Kennan's insights during the early Cold War went well beyond the conventional wisdom of the time. He insisted that Stalin was not another Hitler; that an authoritarian state need not be impermeable to external influences; that an ideology based upon a deterministic view of the past could miscalculate the future; that international communism would not remain monolithic; that war and appeasement were not the only choices open to the United States and its allies in dealing with the dangers that confronted them.

It is not at all clear which theories might have yielded such conclusions. They came instead from Kennan's reading of Gibbon on the Roman Empire, from his knowledge of the history and the culture of Russia, from his own crash course on the great grand strategists while at the National War College—and even from works of imagination, as when he cited Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* to make the point, about the Soviet Union, that "human institutions often show the greatest outward brilliance at a moment when inner decay is . . . farthest advanced." Formal theory, in seeking universal validity, too often disconnects itself from the flow of time. It pays insufficient attention to how things became what they are, which usually offers the best clue to what they will become. History, in contrast—and also literature—distills past experience in such a way as to prepare one for future uncertainties.

The process is intuitive, even impressionistic, involving the ability to see that a situation is "like" one or more that have existed in the past, and that it is worth knowing how the analogous cases were handled. It requires the self-confidence to be selective, the self-discipline to be clear, and a certain amount of self-dramatization to get one's point across. (What else could an eight-thousand-word telegram have been?) It benefits from insights into human nature, which theory rarely provides. It is ironic that Kennan is remembered today as one of the founders of "realism" within the field of international relations, for he never considered himself to be a theorist at all. He was by temperament, by training, and later in life by choice a historian. And he would have liked to have been a novelist.

A FOURTH ASPECT OF THE strategy of containment that might be transposed to other contexts has to do with the relationship between coherence and accountability. Here Kennan was less than prescient: he worried that the volatilities of domestic politics would make it difficult to sustain a consistent grand strategy. He once compared democracy, famously but unwisely, to a "prehistoric monster with . . . a brain the size of a pin." In a sense, he was right: there were repeated re-inventions of containment, with new administrations too mindlessly rejecting the ways their predecessors had applied it. When one looks at the American record throughout the Cold War, though, one cannot help but be struck by the extent to which the larger objectives of containment—avoiding the extremes of war and appeasement while waiting for the Soviet Union to change itself—remained the same, regardless of which party occupied the White House and which approach to containment each chose to embrace.

From that perspective, then, the volatilities look like course corrections imposed by the obligation of democratic accountability. The requirement to hold an election every four years may have made it hard to maintain consistency, but it was a safeguard against complacency, against the compulsion to continue failing strategies in the face of evidence that they were failing. To see the value of this, consider the performance of the Soviet Union, China, and the satellite regimes of Eastern Europe, where the only way to replace defunct strategies was to wait for their architects to die or to be overthrown. That did happen, of course, but not frequently enough to provide protection against the dangers of authoritarian autism—the tendency to persist in error that the absence of accountability encourages.

Nor did shifting approaches to containment impede another kind of accountability, which was the need to combine leadership with consent. It is striking that after four and a half decades of the Cold War, the alliances with which the United States began that contest were largely intact, while the Soviet Union had hardly any allies left. The prospect of something worse than American hegemony helps in part to explain this outcome. It is also the case, though, that the strategists of containment never underestimated the importance of allies. They worked hard to maintain multilateral consent for American leadership in waging the Cold War, without at the same time allowing the need for consultation to paralyze their alliances. Containment in that respect also sets a standard to which future grand strategists—perhaps even current ones—might aspire.

A final lesson from the past that will be usable in the future comes chiefly from Eisenhower, although Kennan agreed with it: it was that containment must not destroy what it was attempting to defend. Eisenhower's concern was that, in the effort to resist an authoritarian adversary, the United States itself might become authoritarian, whether through the imposition of a command economy or through the abridgment of democratic procedures. That never hap-

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pened. Despite the military-industrial complex, the nation maintained its markets; despite McCarthyism, it sustained and ultimately strengthened civil liberties; despite the excesses of Vietnam and Watergate, the strategy of containment never came close to corrupting fundamental American values. They remained, at the end of the Cold War, what they had been at its beginning. The same can hardly be said of fundamental Marxist-Leninist values. So in this sense, too, containment was consistent with Clausewitz: it was an extension of war, diplomacy, and values by other means.

On February 22, 1946, sick in bed from the rigors of a Moscow winter and irritated as usual at the Department of State, Kennan summoned his secretary, Dorothy Hessman, and dictated an unusually long telegram. That document has a better claim than any other to having laid out the path by which the international system found its way from the trajectory of self-destruction it was on during the first half of the twentieth century to a trajectory that had, by the end of the second half, removed the danger of great-power war, revived democracy and capitalism, and thereby enhanced the prospects for human liberty beyond what they had ever been before.

An extravagant claim? Perhaps—but would anyone on that day have regarded the world as safe from the scourge of great-power war? How could it be, when it had not even been possible after World War II to convene a comprehensive peace conference? Or as safe from the dangers of authoritarianism? How could it be, when the Western democracies had to rely, during the war, upon one authoritarian state to defeat the others? Or as safe from a recurrence of economic collapse? How could it be, since there was no assurance that another global depression would not return? Or as safe from abuses of human rights? How could it be, when one of the most advanced nations in Europe had just committed the crime of genocide on an unprecedented scale? Or as safe from the fear that in any future war no one would be safe? How could the world be that either, with atomic weapons having been developed, and with little prospect that they would remain under exclusive American control?

What Kennan opened up, on that bleak day in Moscow in 1946, was a way out: a path that rejected the appeasement and the isolationism that had led to World War II, on the one hand, and on the other the alternative of a third world war, the devastation from which, in a nuclear age, would have been unimaginable. Fifty-nine years later there is much more than a long telegram—and a very long life—for which to be grateful. ■

Robert Alter

One Man's Kafka

K.
By Roberto Calasso
Translated by Geoffrey Brock
(Alfred A. Knopf, 327 pp., $25)

EVER SINCE THE PUBLICATION of Kafka's major fiction in the mid-1920s, beginning a year after his death in 1924, there has been a certain perplexity about how to discuss this strange body of work. From the outset, Kafka's writing struck readers as quintessentially modern—indeed, he was often seen, and with the passage of time would continue to be seen, as a paradigmatic instance of literary modernism. Yet the peculiar fact is that there are no other modern writers who really resemble him. Kafka's unnerving subversion of the assumptions of literary realism has often been seized on as a central expression of his modernist iconoclasm, but nothing akin to it is detectable in the fiction of Musil, Mann, Joyce, Woolf, or Faulkner. He made himself the prose master of a world of bafflement—a condition shared equally if differently by his protagonists and his readers—in which the uncanny could explode without warning from a junk room, from the ring of a doorbell, from a portrait hanging in a seedy office. He created floundering central characters stripped of all but the most vestigial personal memory; social institutions driven by what appeared to be an insane illogic; representations of urban and rural space that were weirdly elastic, resistant to any coherent mapping.

Confronted with a new mode of fiction so stubbornly enigmatic and yet somehow imaginatively authoritative, critics set out at once to interpret it. The early precedent was set by Kafka's friend and literary executor Max Brod, who encouraged readers to look for theological symbolism. Kafka has been interpreted from a variety of theological angles (Kabbalistic, Gnostic, post-theist, even Catholic), and he has been discussed in psychoanalytic, Zionist, Marxist, and other ideological terms. Gershom Scholem, who late in his life grouped the works of Kafka with the Bible and the Zohar as the texts to which he had devoted the most unflagging scrutiny, saw in Kafka what he deemed to be the hallmark of the canonical, which he defined as endless interpretability.

As early as 1934, however, Scholem's friend Walter Benjamin was expressing unease with the very idea of such exegesis: "There are two ways to miss the point of Kafka's works. One is to interpret them naturally, the other is the supernatural interpretation." This tart objection to interpretation still seems just. To interpret Kafka's fiction is to coerce it into a framework of stable meaning—sliding down the slippery slope toward allegory—that the work itself seems devised to unsettle. Still, it remains unclear what the alternative to interpretation might be. Benjamin's own gestures toward an alternative in his two essays on Kafka are immensely suggestive, but they are really no more than the brilliant, episodic impressions of an imaginative reader.

Roberto Calasso's study, which covers Kafka's three novels, some of the major short stories, and material from the diaries and the posthumous fragments, reflects a resolute determination not to interpret the master. In certain respects, Calasso is ideally positioned to carry out this sort of project, and his sometimes engaging book has been quite ably translated by Geoffrey Brock. Calasso is not an academic, but the head of a distinguished publishing house in Milan, and as a freewheeling literary intellectual, he feels no obligation to obey the guild rules, or recite the buzzwords, or do obei-

Robert Alter's new book, IMAGINED CITIES: URBAN EXPERIENCE AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE NOVEL, *will be published by Yale University Press in June.*

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sance to the prestige networks of a persistently self-regarding and insular academic world. He is a man of immense learning (as his previous books attest), with a broad command of historical detail and proficiency in all the modern Western European languages as well as in Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit. He established himself as an utterly original voice in contemporary criticism with *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, which appeared in English in 1993. This idiosyncratic book is a retelling of a good part of the corpus of Greek myth, including many of the variants of the same stories. (That enterprise has some bearing on his approach to Kafka.) Stated this baldly, the aim of the book might sound simplistic, but in fact *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* is a subtle and persuasive reconstruction for moderns of the mental universe of Greek myth, and it is a very rewarding book.

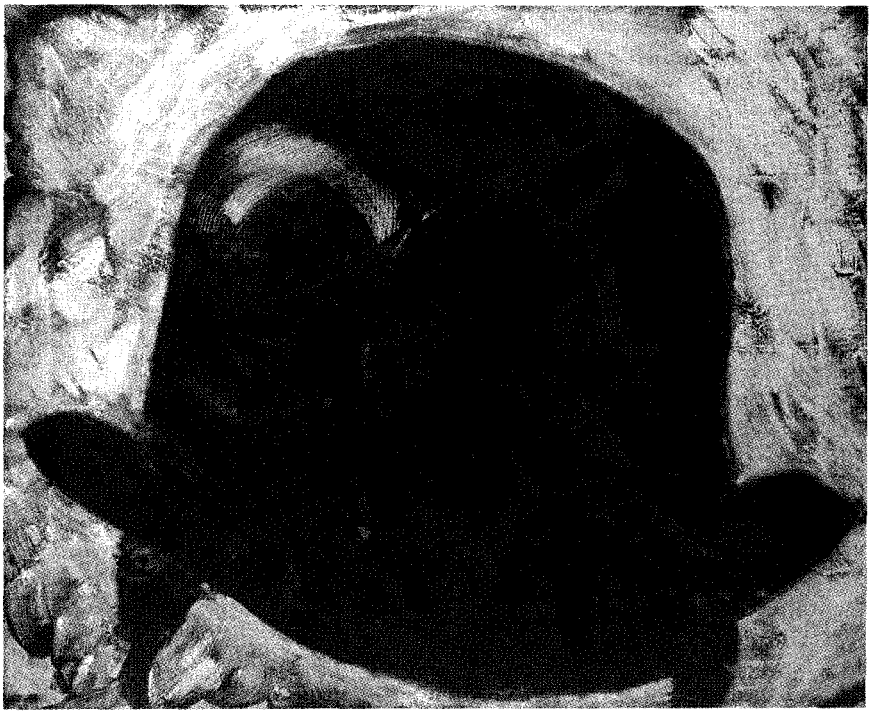
Calasso's other books exhibit some of the virtues, but also the defects of the virtues, of this early study. He is always good at making imaginative connections, and he is incapable of writing anything without some bright ideas, but he also has a tendency to speculate wildly, to spin out free associations between eras, historical figures, writers, theologies, and political trends, with a frequent invocation of sacred Sanskrit texts that blurs more often than it illuminates. By the time one finishes *The Ruin of Kasch* (1994), one wonders whether one has really learned anything—or indeed, whether the book that one has just completed had any identifiable subject. *Literature and the Gods* (2001), in some sense the groundwork for *K.*, includes some bracing ideas—such as the proposition that the modern idea of the good community, which was vehemently espoused by both Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, is actually "pernicious"—but the book also abounds in assertions such as this: "Whatever else it might be, the divine is certainly the thing that imposes with maximum intensity the sensation of being alive." Like much else in Calasso, this is either profound (a neopagan vitalist such as D.H. Lawrence would certainly have embraced it) or not quite coherent, a mere gesture toward profundity.

THIS MAY SOUND ODD, BUT there is nothing in *K.* quite so good as the second paragraph of the book. After evoking in four swift lines the stark beginning of *The Castle*, in which K. stands on the wooden bridge staring up into the "seeming emptiness" in which there may be a castle, Calasso observes:

> Kafka sensed that by then only the minimum number of elements of the surrounding world ought to be named. He plunged the sharpest Ockham's razor into the substance of the novel. To name the bare minimum, and in its pure literality. And why so? Because the world was turning back into a primeval forest, too fraught with strange noises and apparitions. Everything had too much power. Thus it became necessary to limit oneself to what lay closest at hand, to circumscribe the zone of the nameable. Then all that power, otherwise diffuse, would be channeled there, and whatever was named—an inn, a file, an office, a room—would fill with unprecedented energy.

This may be as good an account of the strangeness of Kafka's world and the reason for its bizarre coherence as anyone has offered, and the comment about Kafka's plunging "the sharpest Ockham's razor into the substance of the novel" is itself almost worth the price of the book. One sees in a flash why Kafka differs so radically from his master Flaubert.

The notion that there is something archaic about Kafka's fictional world goes back to Benjamin, who actually spoke of a "prehistoric world" in Kafka, but it must be said that Calasso makes excellent imaginative use of the idea. A few pages on, he argues that in *The Castle* the social order has been superimposed on the cosmic order: "the majesty and the articulations of the old order are retained even as the memory of it is erased." The result, he wittily concludes, is that "the mythic landscape has lost its pigmentation." Later he explains the seeming paradox that this purportedly archaic imagination is repeatedly engaged with the circumstances and institutions of modernity by proposing that "an archaic element ... commingles with a contemporary element that hadn't yet any way of manifesting itself. The result is a potent chemical compound no one knows how to handle."



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R. B. KITAJ, *Kafka's Hat*, 2003–2004

These are insights well worth pondering, but the problem is that a local insight does not necessarily provide the grounds for a sustained reading of a great writer. (The same problem besets Benjamin, who is—in his Kafka essays but also more generally—a master of the dazzling *aperçu* rather than of sustained argument.) Calasso, having registered in this fashion the pervasive ontological strangeness of Kafka's fictional world,

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proceeds to evoke that quality by tirelessly, and tiresomely, retelling Kafka. This strategy is essentially the one he adopted for Greek myth in *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, but it does not succeed in the same way here, as I shall try to explain.

A LARGE PART OF CALASSO'S book is taken up with statements such as the following. On *The Castle*:

> K. quickly adopts the tone of one victimized by an abuse of power. If, however, he were really incontrovertibly within his rights, he ought at least to have in hand an official letter of appointment to the post of land surveyor. But it seems that he never received such a letter. A haze of mystification hovers around K., as around everything done or said by Castle officials.

And on the infernal machine of pedagogic capital punishment of "In the Penal Colony": "In order to reach a level of unquestionable truth, knowledge must be inscribed—in the sense of *incised*—on the body. Only in this way could one make sure that the word passed instantly into the blood." Calasso offers a rationale at one point for this procedure of close paraphrase and synopsis, in the form of a quotation from Elias Canetti, who is virtually the only critic of Kafka besides Benjamin who is cited in the book: "There are certain writers—very few, in fact—who are so utterly themselves that any statement one might presume to make about them might seem barbarous. One such writer was Franz Kafka; accordingly, one must, even at the risk of seeming slavish, adhere as closely as possible to his own statements."

Calasso throughout the book is perfectly willing to seem slavish. As a result, very little that he says violates Kafka, and everything is steeped in the spirit of Kafka, but not much illuminates Kafka. To take the two examples I have just quoted, is there any reader of *The Castle* who does not recognize that K.'s tone is that of a man victimized by power, or that he lacks the authenticating letter that would clarify his status? Is there any reader of "In the Penal Colony" who could fail to see that the purpose of the Commandant's machine is to incise the judicial truth into the body of the condemned man?

The difference between retelling Greek myth and retelling Kafka becomes apparent. Greek myth, after all, conjures up a series of scenes and images that are bound to seem strange to most people at the beginning of the third Christian millennium: a god raining down in a shower of gold on the object of his lust, a taurine monster coupling with a maiden, a loving wife pulled back to Hades when her devoted husband casts a backward glance at her as they flee the underworld. What all these stories were meant to suggest would presumably have been accessible to an ancient Greek because he was directly in touch with the living culture and the popular religion out of which the stories issued. To moderns, such materials may well be fascinating, but they are also likely to be a little opaque, or simply alien. Calasso's retelling of the Greek myths boldly helps us to see, from the immense distance of our own cultural location, something of their imaginative coherence, something of the way they constitute an account of the nature of reality. But a restatement of Kafka's fiction, of what happens on the surface of the novels and stories, however alert to nuance and detail, is not especially helpful, because what is on the surface, through Kafka's explicit design, is perfectly accessible to us.

The Castle may abound in uncanny and perplexing events and figures, but we moderns (and postmoderns too) share the novelist's living culture, and so we can follow K.'s predicament of attempting to cope with a remote and seemingly perverse bureaucracy, and of trying to establish a place for himself in a community that may not even be a community, and that regards him as an incorrigible outsider. Much the same could be said of Joseph K. in *The Trial*. Of course he is an inveterate loner, a man extravagantly open to the assumption of unspecified guilt, and someone whose human instincts have been replaced by the habits of bureaucratic procedure; but it is Kafka's genius to convert the pathological into the exemplary, making his self-subverting isolate a modern European Everyman who is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.

The fantastic apparatus of "In the Penal Colony" is a little different, obviously: it is a nightmarish extrapolation from the world we know rather than an evocation of predicaments that we are likely to share more directly. The preoccupation with guilt and with imposing figures of authority is the very idiolect of Kafka's own inner realm, but in an era in which authoritarianism would assume the most devastating political forms, and in which, against a background of corrosive skepticism and relativism, atavistic longings for an absolute truth would variously assert themselves, readers have little difficulty entering into the terrifying world of Kafka's story. We may puzzle about what it means, but it draws us in powerfully as experience. Understanding what "happens" in the fiction is not a problem, and so the retelling of the tale does not take us anywhere that an unaided reading would not.

K. does employ, episodically, a method of critical commentary that supplements the predominant strategy of narrative paraphrase, and it is to link what goes on in Kafka's fiction with other bodies of literature and thought, and with other cultural artifacts and historical events. Some of the references, predictably, are to Vedic religion. Thus Calasso, having proposed, rather gnomically, but in keeping with his perception of an archaic world in this fiction, that Kafka's subject is a "mass of power, not yet differentiated," goes on to say, "It is the shapeless body of Vitra, which contains the waters, before Indra runs it through with a thunderbolt." I am not sure that a mass of undifferentiated powers explains much about *The Castle*; and when we move on from that to this image from Vedic mythology, we find ourselves sunk in an association that no doubt speaks personally to Calasso but is not likely to be helpful to many readers.

The freedom of associative thinking in Calasso is palpable even when the associations are less exotic. Though *Herren* could indeed mean "rulers" as well as "gentlemen" or "lords," are the *Herren* who come down from the Castle readily identified ("if only we give the word enough room to resonate," Calasso says),

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with the *archon* of Gnostic theology? There is much in *The Castle* that is patently farcical, but is there any scene in the novel that resembles a Busby Berkeley musical, as is claimed here? How plausible is it to describe the representation of the chambermaids' room in *The Castle* as "something out of an Elizabethan play"? And if there is some limited justification for saying that the landlady at the Bridge Inn identifies K. immediately as an enemy, "just as the high-level agents of the Ochrana could spot a young terrorist in a shapeless mass of students," is not the injection of czarist political imagery into *The Castle* a distortion of the distinctive world of this novel that, after all, has little to do with the ambience of the Romanov empire?

THE ONE RESPECT IN WHICH the otherwise unexegetical Calasso begins to slide toward allegory is in identifying the purportedly Jewish references in Kafka. The Jewishness of Kafka's fiction has long been a source of contention among critics. His correspondence and diaries, and also the testimonies of his friends, provide abundant evidence of his preoccupation with Jewish culture and tradition, and the ambiguities of being a Jew in modern Europe—and yet he scrupulously excluded all references to Jews from his fiction (with the exception of one strange story involving an animal in the women's gallery of a synagogue). Many readers have detected a Jewish matrix beneath the universalizing surface of his fiction, but there has been no consensus as to what it might be. Yet Calasso, elsewhere circumspect in making statements about Kafka that might be "barbarous," casts aside these restraints with regard to Jewishness, not hesitating to sketch direct translations between the fiction and the social and historical circumstances of modern European Jews.

If K. gains entry into the home of the one family considered outcasts in the village, Calasso feels free to state that "in Olga's house, K. senses and recognizes that feeling of familiarity that the assimilated Jew feels in the home of other assimilated Jews." The reason for the family's ostracism was the rejection by Olga's sister Amalia of a crude sexual overture in a letter from one of the Castle officials: "Between Amalia's gesture of shredding Sortini's letter and her father's grueling attempts to make his petitions heard sprawls the gamut of situations that accompanied the persecution of central Europe's Jews." And, not content to push *The Castle* toward social allegory, Calasso goes on to make it prophetic—surely a cardinal sin in the reading of Kafka—by claiming that "what happened later, in the Hitler years, was first and foremost a literalization of this process."

One expression of Kafka's commitment to giving his fiction a universalizing cast is his rigorous avoidance of Jewish personal names. The single, perhaps marginal, exception is the merchant Block in *The Trial*. Block would in all likelihood have been identified as a Jewish name by most German speakers of this period, though a little less confidently than Cohen or Segal or Schechter. But the rather modest hint conveyed by the name triggers a kind of Jewish phantasmagoria in Calasso's reading of *The Trial*. Joseph K.'s ambivalence toward Block, a fellow defendant, is explained as his subjecting "the merchant to those violent oscillations between attraction and aversion that assimilated Jews endured in the period between the first emancipations and Hitler." Block in a kneeling posture before the lawyer Huld has as his "model ... Moses before Yahweh." Block scrutinizing a sheaf of documents bearing on his case "appears to us as a Hasid immersed in the Torah."

When it comes to Jewish meanings, it seems, all interpretations are permissible. With these invocations of the horizon of the Hitler years, of Moses prostrate before the God of Israel, and of the Hasid conning his text (an especially awkward identification—why a Hasid?—that suggests a very limited acquaintance with these materials), Calasso introduces into his interpretation of Kafka a misplaced concreteness, which amounts to a kind of vulgarity—an intellectual fault one would scarcely have expected of him.

As the identification of purportedly Jewish concerns in *K.* illustrates, one way *not* to read Kafka is to draw equations between figures and situations in the fiction and social or historical—not to speak of theological or political—phenomena that happen to be of interest to the interpreter. This is interpretation with a vengeance, the very activity against which Benjamin inveighed. The more common procedure of Calasso's book, the retelling of Kafka's texts, does not violate them in this fashion, though, as we have seen, it also does not much advance the understanding of them.

WHAT IS A CRITIC TO DO, then, with Kafka's fiction? Perhaps it might be best to think of Kafka not as a visionary or a theologian or an oblique social historian or some sort of radical heresiarch but, before all else, as a writer of fiction. Whatever his spiritual or philosophical or psychological concerns, he was a writer who had studiously read many of the masters of European fiction (Kleist, Flaubert, Dickens, and many others) and who aspired to be their worthy heir and hence lavished great care in cultivating the art of fiction. One reason that he asked Brod to burn his unpublished writings was surely his sense that he had not sufficiently perfected that art.

The novels and the stories of Kafka may well be dense with meanings, some of them obscure, but they are first of all strongly imagined fictional worlds, constituted through the use of a certain narrative point of view, the deployment of a particular style, the management of character and dialogue, the recourse to often quite surprising metaphors, and the representation of concrete entities—city streets, interiors, village houses, mechanical contraptions, details of attire, and much more. In stubborn opposition to all the critics who seek symbols in Kafka's world (Calasso is not one of them, except perhaps in regard to the Jews), I would argue that it is Kafka's fecund invention of concrete details—sometimes startling, sometimes grotesque or uncanny, sometimes compellingly mimetic—that generates much of the peculiar magic of his fiction.

The nameless city of *The Trial* is built out of bits and pieces of early twentieth-century Prague but serves quite arrestingly as a European Everycity. It exists in a kind of space warp: it is never quite clear how you get from one point to another, but somehow you usually end up in claustrophobically narrow streets and alleys crowded with urchins and stinking from open sewers, and every building seems to turn into a warren of dark stairwells, airless corridors, and dirty attics devoid of windows. As many interpreters have variously proposed, all this can be seen as a projection of Joseph K.'s oxygen-deprived sordid inner life, but is also the artfully fashioned manifestation of an integrated fictional world, faithfully drawn from certain observable realities of actual European cities. Kafka was not a realist, but he had studied the masterworks of Euro-

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pean realism and adopted some of their procedures for his own, different ends.

We will do more justice to Kafka if we ask fewer questions about what he means, and direct less attention to the eons or the era that he purportedly reflects or to the mythology that he supposedly manifests, and instead look at the finely wrought and endlessly inventive fashioning of the fictional world that he invites us to enter in the traditional way: through the story told, the images conjured up, the language used, the sense of character and place indelibly evoked. ■

Nicholas Howe
The Landscape and That

STICKS & STONES:
ARCHITECTURAL AMERICA
By Lee Friedlander
(D.A.P./Fraenkel Gallery, 216 pp., $85)

LEE FRIEDLANDER VIOLATES all the pieties of architectural photography. He does not render buildings placeless by isolating them from their surroundings; he does not use the proper equipment to prevent distortion; and he clutters the view with signs, shadows, fences, trees, utility poles. Everything that a photographer for a glossy architectural magazine would consider amateurish becomes triumphant art in Friedlander's new book.

These photographs do not have the analytical elegance that characterize those by, say, the late Ezra Stoller, whose style beautifully complemented the work of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier. Stoller saw the building as a very large piece of sculpture to be celebrated for its aesthetics far more than for its function or its setting. In his photographs, less is more: less of the scene is more of the building. But Friedlander, perhaps even in reaction, sets buildings deep within their social landscape. His images are strikingly composed, but they are the work of a street photographer using a handheld camera who shoots as he walks.

Sticks & Stones contains photographs taken over fifteen years in almost thirty states and provinces across North America, often in the course of other assignments and projects. Friedlander has typically gathered images in this way, as the patient and quietly observant work of the years. His earlier books bring together photographs of jazz musicians, for whom he has an evident affection and affinity; or self-portraits so unflattering as to be enormously appealing; or televisions in various places, including motel rooms where he has stayed during his travels; or public monuments and statues across America. *Sticks & Stones* is his largest archive, comprising 196 photographs, but it is not a totalizing collection like August Sander's famous project of photographing the classes and occupations of pre–World War II Germany. Instead Friedlander sets out to demonstrate through his images what it means each day to look, and to look again, at things we rarely contemplate at length: an unkempt face in the mirror, the public statuary of parks, the built landscapes we move through obliviously.

For many years, Friedlander has worked with a 35-millimeter camera, shooting in black and white. He came to prominence in the 1960s, especially after sharing a 1967 show called "New Documents" with Diane Arbus and Garry Winogrand at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Although their work shares certain qualities, not least a disturbing unease in the familiar world, Friedlander has the most searching—and enduring—eye of the three. His austere compositions rarely rely on sensationalized subjects (as Arbus's do) or manipulations of the image plane (as Winogrand's do). Instead they resemble their subjects in being easy to pass over. If one does look hard, however, they become haunting, long after more initially provocative images have dissolved into clichés.

For all that Friedlander's tricks are easy to imitate—include the telephone pole instead of cropping it out, shoot through a chain-link fence instead of reaching around it—his style is very hard to capture. As is often the case with a signature style, the tricks are merely the outward sign of an artist's way of seeing. And without some appreciation of that way of seeing, anyone imitating him will produce images that seem merely annoying.

AT THE HEART OF FRIEDLANDER's architectural photography is the play between the visual and the material. He continually insists that he is looking at a building or scene with a camera, unlike those glossy *Architectural Digest* photographs that are deliberately impersonal, lest they distract from the architect's genius. Friedlander is always reminding us that things get in the way as he looks—or, more exactly, that the unimpeded visual scene of a building without cars or power lines or street signs is a highly manipulated photographic artifact. The view punctuated with street lights or fences is the view we experience daily while passing through the built landscape. But his work does more than remind us that things get in the way. It also lets us recognize, if we look carefully, that those impediments are themselves compelling. The texture and tone of the material—its quality as wood or steel, its surface as matte or reflective—become essential to the experience of place.

Friedlander's fascination with the material quality of images is not distinctive to him; it can be found in Edward Weston, Aaron Siskind, and Harry Callahan. But unlike them, Friedlander does not treat the material qualities of texture and surface as abstract. If Weston's bell peppers seem inedible, or Siskind's walls resemble heavily impastoed paintings, or Callahan's tree branches magically enlace human figures, Friedlander's photographs remain in the literal world. The wire of his fences will cut you if you try to climb over them; the concrete of his sidewalks will scorch your feet in the summer.

The material feel of Friedlander's images, along with his use of black-and-white film in a handheld camera, suggests a certain affinity with the work of a street photographer such as Robert Frank. Friedlander has acknowledged his affinity with Frank's *The Americans*, but he departs from Frank in *Sticks & Stones* by rarely showing human figures.

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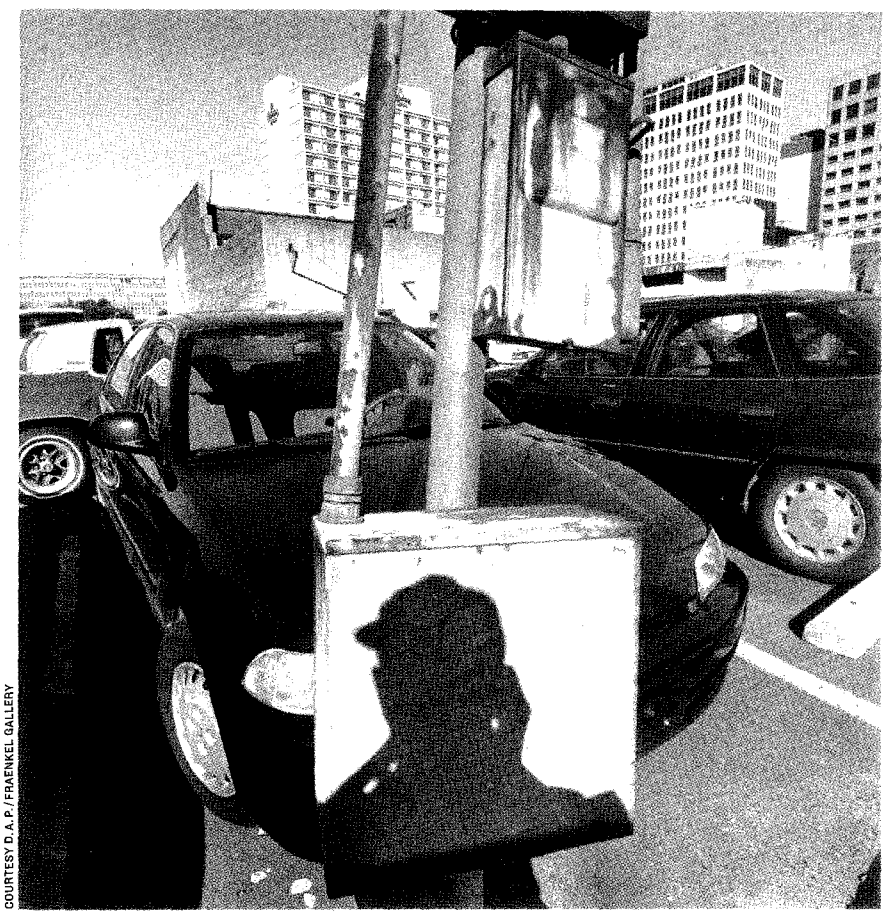
He includes a few people, such as a young woman talking on a public telephone (a favorite feature in his work) or a couple descending into the New York City subway system. But these are not the most memorable images in this book, perhaps because they make too explicit what his best ones keep implicit.

The great photographs of *Sticks & Stones* register the presence of people who have just turned the corner or otherwise walked out of the visual field framed by Friedlander's viewfinder. He captures their presence obliquely, through cars or litter or shadows, sometimes through the writing on signs or the graffiti on walls. We know that people have just occupied the places that he photographs, even if they are not visible at the moment he presses the shutter. Registering human traces on a built landscape is hardly unique, of course, to Friedlander. Almost all of Atget's photographs are unpeopled, though they are always marked by the fugitive presence of Parisians. In the American landscape, Walker Evans depicted storefronts and streets without human figures but recorded their presence through the written slogans and names they left behind.

Here, too, Friedlander sets off on his own. His places have none of the soon-to-be-gone quality that Atget's often do; they are not documents of a vanishing city. Nor does Friedlander take the same writerly pleasure with words in his images as Evans does. They are part of the usual scene, and rarely yield clever puns when read against the visual content of the photograph. They are there in the scene as the STOP of a traffic sign or the alphanumerics of a license plate. Atget and Evans were, each in his way, elegists of place; each took pictures of scenes that he knew would soon disappear from memory if not recorded on film. Over time, and in ways that neither would have entirely welcomed, their images have come to seem quaintly nostalgic, because we miss those Parisian culs-de-sac and small-town main streets. Never mind that we know them only because Atget and Evans captured them.

It is hard to imagine anyone becoming nostalgic for the spaces of Friedlander's photographs: city parking lots wrapped in chain-link fences; desolate western landscapes with the junk-filled beds of battered pickup trucks in the foreground; vacant storefronts in dying small towns; junky cars blocking the view of steel and glass buildings in downtowns that empty at the close of business. Friedlander works with clutter and vacancy, the visual noise of the built landscape. He does not play the counter-intuitive game of photographing such spaces to reveal their hidden beauty, as if through his composing eye he can make the mundane alluring. Nor does he appropriate the aesthetics of Stoller's photographs of Mies's Seagram Building or Corbusier's chapel at Ronchamp. His parking lots are where people park their cars, his street scenes where they walk to work or shop.



COURTESY D.A.P./FRAENKEL GALLERY

LEE FRIEDLANDER, *New Orleans, Louisiana, 1995*

Friedlander has been taking these kinds of photographs since at least the early 1960s. One of the most famous of them, "Knoxville, 1971," is a horizontal image of an ordinary scene on the edge of town: an empty lot in the foreground, a small, plain house in the middle ground with a white camping trailer and tree to its left and another tree and a small white car to its right. In the center of the immediate foreground is the back of a triangular sign that throws its dark reflection onto the sidewalk beyond. We cannot read its front, but we know from its shape that it must say YIELD. It is a scene easy to ignore in my description of it, but very hard to forget when captured on film by Friedlander in its geometrically structured emptiness.

The composition of "Knoxville, 1971" is insistently horizontal. Working with a 35-millimeter camera that can be turned horizontal or vertical, Friedlander chose here to use the orientation that in traditional easel painting was favored for landscapes (with the vertical favored for portraits). In his early work, Friedlander used the flexibility of the 35-millimeter format to shoot urbanscapes in either format. Thus in "Paris, 1978" he captured the rooflines of Paris buildings behind the heavy horizontal of a wood-framed construction fence filled in with chicken wire; and in "New York, 1976" he used the vertical to shoot the back face of a stepped skyscraper with a chain-link gate drawn halfway across the foreground.

In *Sticks & Stones*, Friedlander renounces the flexibility of the 35-millimeter format and instead relies on a square negative. All the photographs in

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this book were shot, as James Enyeart explains in his afterword, with a camera that mounts an extreme wide-angle lens on a film back (presumably a super-wide Hasselblad), eliminating the choice between horizontal and vertical. The square format is demanding for shooting architectural scenes because vertical and horizontal elements must be balanced without relying on the conventions of landscape and portrait. The photographer must learn to re-see the relation between two axes of presentation, which is to say, between the two genres. Nor can Friedlander's camera render verticals without distortion, because its film plane cannot be kept parallel to the building. As a result, the verticals in his images do not remain parallel as they do in reality, but begin to converge and to lean backward. No celebrity architect would want a photographer to use such a camera.

So why does Friedlander take picture after picture of architectural America with this camera? For several reasons: the lens is sufficiently wide-angled to allow him to shoot very close to the scene; the quality of resolution it yields is superb; and no tripod is needed. In fact, it can almost be used as a point-and-shoot camera, though of a very professional sort. With it, Friedlander can work as a street photographer of the scenes that fill our lives. Yet that camera is there for anyone who can afford it, so what explains the remarkable photographs that he has produced with it?

The answer lies in Friedlander's practice of honoring the square format and the extreme wide-angle lens. He can include an unusual measure of immediate foreground with this lens, thereby adding depth to the image, while also forcing the viewer to move outward in order to balance its edges into a square composition. With this lens, he can also easily include his signature self-portrait: a shadow intruding into the image. These photographs are by a man on the move, someone who walks and looks and then takes pictures. His compositions are never so perfectly framed as to seem static (the danger of a tripod shot), nor do they cheaply exploit the conventions of horizontal versus vertical.

JUST BECAUSE FRIEDLANDER IS INterested in places that most people consider ugly does not mean that he is out to prove they are beautiful. Instead, his work suggests that the photographer cannot ignore so much of the built American landscape, but is obligated to document what we pass through day in and day out. Friedlander does not work as an elegist, but he is intensely aware of time's presence in his scenes: how cities decline and are rebuilt, how they show both the rundown and brand new in the same block. In these stationary images of buildings, Friedlander often introduces a suggestion of mobility by foregrounding cars and trucks or even by shooting through a vehicle's side window or windshield. He is, unlikely as it sounds, a connoisseur of parking lots.

As an example of Friedlander's work in *Sticks & Stones*, consider "New Orleans, Louisiana, 1995." For all the specificity of time and place in the title, the image could be from almost any city or large town in America. It certainly has none of the tawdry exoticism associated with the Big Easy. Instead, it shows three cars parked haphazardly in the foreground and a range of undistinguished buildings in the background—all bisected by a metal pole. It's the scene you avoid looking at while driving to the French Quarter. And yet in Friedlander's handling it reveals much of interest. The buildings are not all the same: a low brick industrial structure breaks the line of newer and taller structures, including that icon of America nowhereness, a Holiday Inn. The cars are jammed into the foreground in a way that suggests sheer randomness. The scene is cut by a metal pole supporting an electrical junction box and leading upward to an illuminated sign we cannot see but suspect must include the word PARKING.

As we look higher to read the sign, we confront the squareness of this image, because we cannot see what is above and instead must look to its sides to complete the scene. We realize that the pattern of the cars is not random, but forms a counterpoint to the pattern of the buildings along the skyline. Then we register the photographer's presence as a shadow on the light-colored box—a shape that tellingly repeats the format of the photograph—in the exact center of the foreground. Inside it, the silhouette shows Friedlander wearing a cap and holding the camera to his eye—the logo of the street photographer passing through and framing a shot. This self-portrait carries to the last degree Friedlander's fascination with portraying the artist as, in Andy Grundberg's phrase, "shadow, reflection, and cipher." There is no claim for the scene's beauty here, nor any self-preening pleasure at slumming; only the insistence of the shadowy photographer that this is what our cities look like now.

That insistence is, for all its deceptively modest or mundane quality, a deeply serious claim for the value of photography in its traditional form: film, not digital; the square negative printed without cropping or manipulation; the avoidance of all that seems immediately provocative. All it offers is "that moment when the landscape speaks to the observer," to quote a phrase that Friedlander used in the introduction to his book *Self Portrait*, which appeared in 1970.

THE LANDSCAPE THAT FRIEDlander photographs is egalitarian, ubiquitous, and mundane. He has always used titles to record where he took a picture, but in *Sticks & Stones* he does not run them as captions. Instead they are listed in the back of the book for the curious reader to consult, as if to suggest that these images are more characteristic of a nation than specific to a setting. They belong to "architectural America," in the book's subtitle, because they are not exotic unto their place. The book ranges widely across America, but there is a sense that these sticks and stones are very much of a single culture.

Enyeart suggests that Whitman's poetry can be taken as an analogue or inspiration for Friedlander's work of cataloguing America. Certainly the photographer shares the poet's reverence for the daily and the familiar, but he does not celebrate it with Whitman's high, incantatory style. The poem that speaks more evocatively to *Sticks & Stones* is Wallace Stevens's "The American Sublime":

> One grows used to the weather,
> The landscape and that;
> And the sublime comes down
> To the spirit itself,
>
> The spirit and space,
> The empty spirit
> In vacant space.

The American sublime must be the American mundane if it is not to betray us into gestures of transcendental vacuity: it must be a place built of common materials that sit amid vacant lots. Toward that end, Friedlander offers in this extraordinary book 196 enduringly scrupulous images of "the landscape and that." ■

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Saul

"THE TRUTH, WHATEVER IT is, is strange." I can still hear Saul's voice, for a few moments absent its gaiety and its wickedness, gently pronouncing those emancipating words. It was a summer afternoon in 1977. We were sunk in Adirondack chairs on the grass behind the shed of a house that he was renting in Vermont, and sunk also in a sympathetic discussion of Owen Barfield's theories of consciousness. Chopped wood was piled nearby like old folios, dry and combustible. When I met Bellow, he was in his theosophical enthusiasm. The legend of his worldliness went before him, obviously, not least in his all-observing, wised-up books, which proclaimed the profane charisma of common experience. Since I have a happy weakness for metaphysical speculation, a cellular certainty that what we see is not all there is, I thought I detected in some of his writings signs of the old hunt for a knowledge beyond knowingness, for an understanding that is more than merely brilliant. I was not altogether surprised when our first meeting moved swiftly toward an unembarrassed conversation about spirituality. (This was preceded by complaints about Hannah Arendt. We had to get comfortable.) I had never before encountered a Jewish intellectual of his generation who could say "spirituality" without choking. And as Saul discoursed on the lawn, in an engineer's cap, about "living significantly," I celebrated my friend's unlikely interest in credulity. I recalled that it was he who had translated "Gimpel the Fool." Even the imbecilic orgone box looked like an error in a classical direction. "I guess I am a sucker for people who talk about the deeper things of life," says Tommy Wilhelm. But I explained to Saul that I could not follow him into the floridities of Rudolph Steiner. I said that Steiner was Tamkin without the lard, for which I was rewarded with an operatic Bellovian laugh. I told Saul that I preferred the spiritual profit of reason. Saul wondered whether reason belonged in our deliberations. And I wondered whether fiction could bear so much metaphysics. Soon it was twilight. We fixed an early and simple dinner. For a beautiful hour we sat before the fire and Saul read from the "Zetland" manuscript, which was again in his typewriter.

SAUL'S PARTICULAR COMBINATION OF intellectuality and vitality was not paradoxical, it was category-shattering. He was a Lawrentian Jew, an impossible creature. Energy was, in a way, his very theme. Was ever a bookish soul so cracklingly unmediated, so flush with raw life? He was as vivid physically as he was mentally, almost perversely alert, completely at home in the world of matter, repulsed by tedium. "Wakeful" was one of his highest terms of praise. Saul's notion was that there could be nothing wan about the truth, or about the quest for it, or about the language in which the quest was depicted. His novels and his stories, for this reason, often place wisdom in the mouths of charlatans and hustlers and losers. Accept the truth from whoever speaks it, the Talmud advises. Eccentricity, for Saul, conferred an analytical advantage, because it promised a fresh standpoint, from which things previously not noted might be noted; and what he disliked about the intellectuals of his time was their lack of it. Sometimes the mockery of thinking people in his books irritated me, the way the anti-intellectualism of intellectuals always does; many of his plots concerned the humiliation of intellectuality by vitality, and he taught his readers, among many other things, that seriousness was a little ludicrous. But in fact Saul was the most ferocious of the believers in ideas, because he protested that they could be found everywhere, and that they could be a primary subject of literature. He did not deny the problem of being, but he preferred to set it in the subway. When Herzog wrote to Heidegger, it was because he desperately needed an answer. This was funny, but it was not grotesque. Saul liked his profundities vernacular. What is so exciting about the carnal and commercial tumult in which his tales rejoice is that it never lets go of the question of how to live. As a matter of philosophical principle and artistic method, he married life to thought. It was, along with his late, deep union with Janis Freedman, Bellow's successful marriage.

HE WAS, AS IS WELL-KNOWN, HILARIous. We sat together at Robert Lowell's funeral in a high and swishy church in Boston, and I remember that Saul's reverence for the deceased was fully matched by his irreverence for those who were dispatching the deceased. I bit my tongue until it bled. (After we were sprung from the pews, we recited some of Lowell's lines: "... wolfing the stray lambs who hungered by the Place de la Concorde...") He never lost the freethinker's delight in a good blasphemy. But Saul blasphemed equitably, and all around: he was a recreational savager of pieties. There is the view that finally he was a comic writer, the quarrelsome master only of the American urban carnivalesque. It is not my view. His famously manic books contain much stillness and much sadness. In *Seize the Day*, which James Wood has rightly called the most Russian of his works, almost nothing happens, in the way that almost nothing happens in Beckett or Kawabata. When it came to concealing his troubles, Saul Bellow was not less capable than the next fellow; but I do not think that they were ever dispersed. Was he, as the newspapers keep repeating, a dandy? But the dandy is a prince of dejection. ("When a man is ... wearing a hat, he has an advantage.") I always had the feeling about Saul that he was inwardly at war, that he breakfasted with his demons. He had melancholy eyes, except when they sparkled. His laughter was the sound of a snatched victory.

IN THE CEMETERY IN BRATTLEBORO, A row of tall junipers sets off a Jewish section. There our *Zauberjude* was buried last week, as Shaul ben Avraham, by family and friends who desolately wielded the shovels until the dirt that covered his coffin was level with the ground upon which the living walked, in accordance with traditional Jewish practice. As I was leaving I glanced back, and suddenly I needed him. Three shovels stood rudely in the remains of the dirt pile. Like stubbed cigarettes, I thought—but that was no good. I needed Saul for his mighty power of metaphor, so that he could tell me what his own grave looked like, what unexpected word, what unimagined element of the universe, could unlock its meaning. Who will describe things, and so quicken them, now?

LEON WIESELTIER

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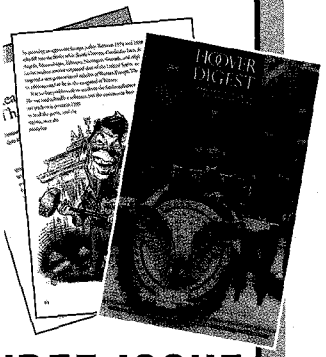

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Bringing Democracy to the Middle East

There is a demographic time bomb ticking in the Middle East, and it is going to sweep away a lot of Western-leaning regimes unless true reform begins soon.

By Larry Diamond

The Arab world is the only major region that does not have a single democracy. If we look at the Middle East in general, only Israel and Turkey are democracies. Of the 16 Arab states, only Lebanon has ever been a democracy, and only a few could be described today even as semi-democratic. Whereas the rest of the world has been moving toward democracy and greater freedom over the past three remarkable decades, the Arab world has remained politically stagnant. In fact, the Arab region is the only part of the world where the average Freedom House rating of political rights and civil liberties is worse today than it was in 1974. . . .

To the extent that Arab regimes do not reform politically and economically, they will erupt in one form or another over the coming years. What Thomas Friedman calls the "global supply chain" of suicide bombers is one form of eruption. The wave of venomous anti-Americanism is another. The rising tide of terrorist attacks inside Saudi Arabia is another. Sclerotic regimes that cannot generate jobs and hope at a faster rate than the population is growing cannot persist indefinitely. And the market-oriented economic reforms necessary to unleash economic growth are unlikely to occur without democratic change because, unless governments have much greater political legitimacy, they will not have the nerve, or the autonomy from the decades-long accumulation of vested interests, to take bold and difficult steps.

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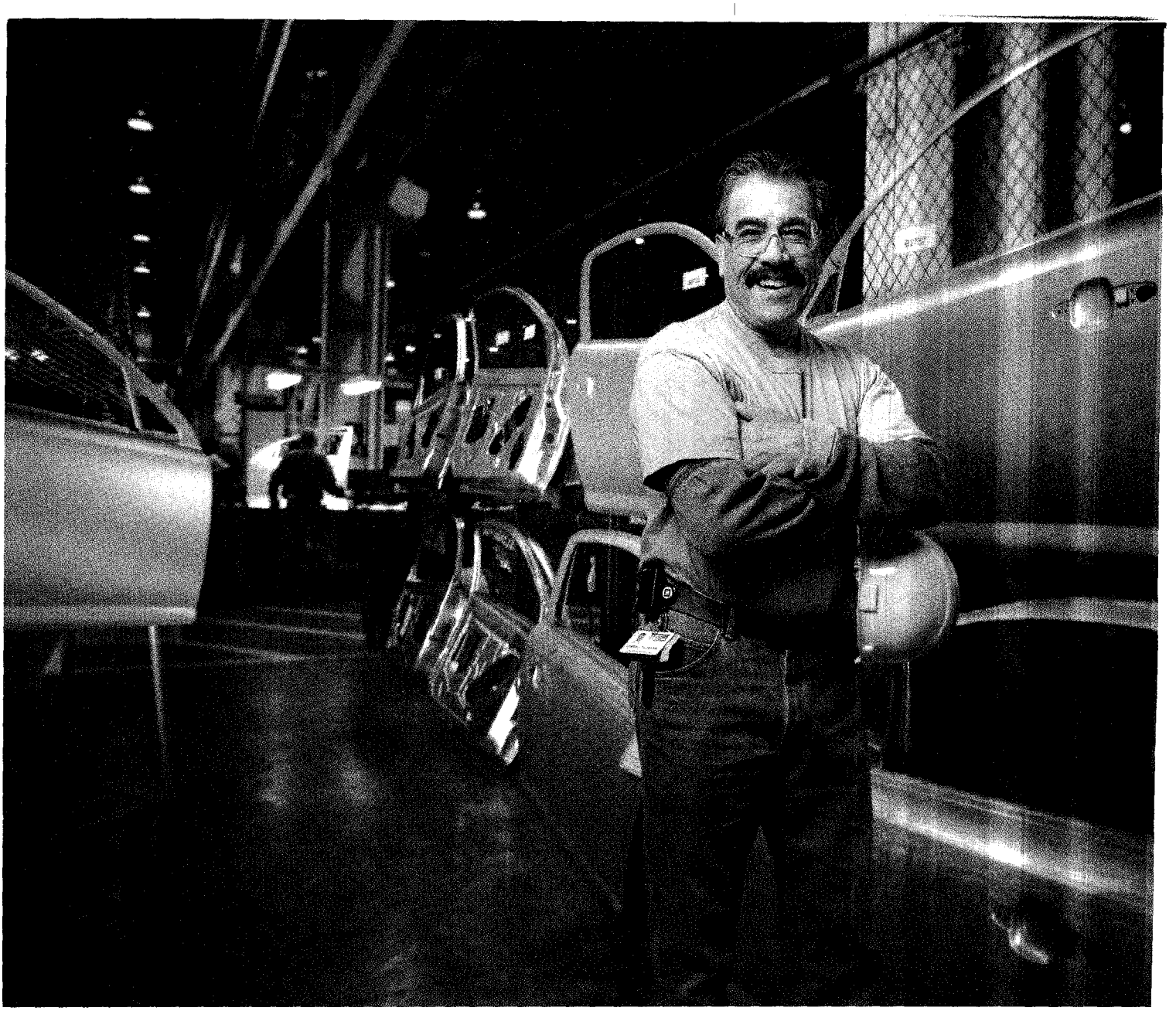

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